

Rolling Stone

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THE ODD COUPLE MITT & NEWT

By MATT TAIBBI

SCHOOL OF HATE
ONE TOWN'S
WAR ON
GAY TEENS

ETTA JAMES
HER HEARTBREAK
AND TRIUMPH

HOW THE FBI
TOOK DOWN
MEGAUPLOAD

2012 GRAMMY
PREDICTIONS

THE RETURN
OF THE SHINS

Inside The Voice

THE DIVA,
THE DRAMA,
THE DIRT





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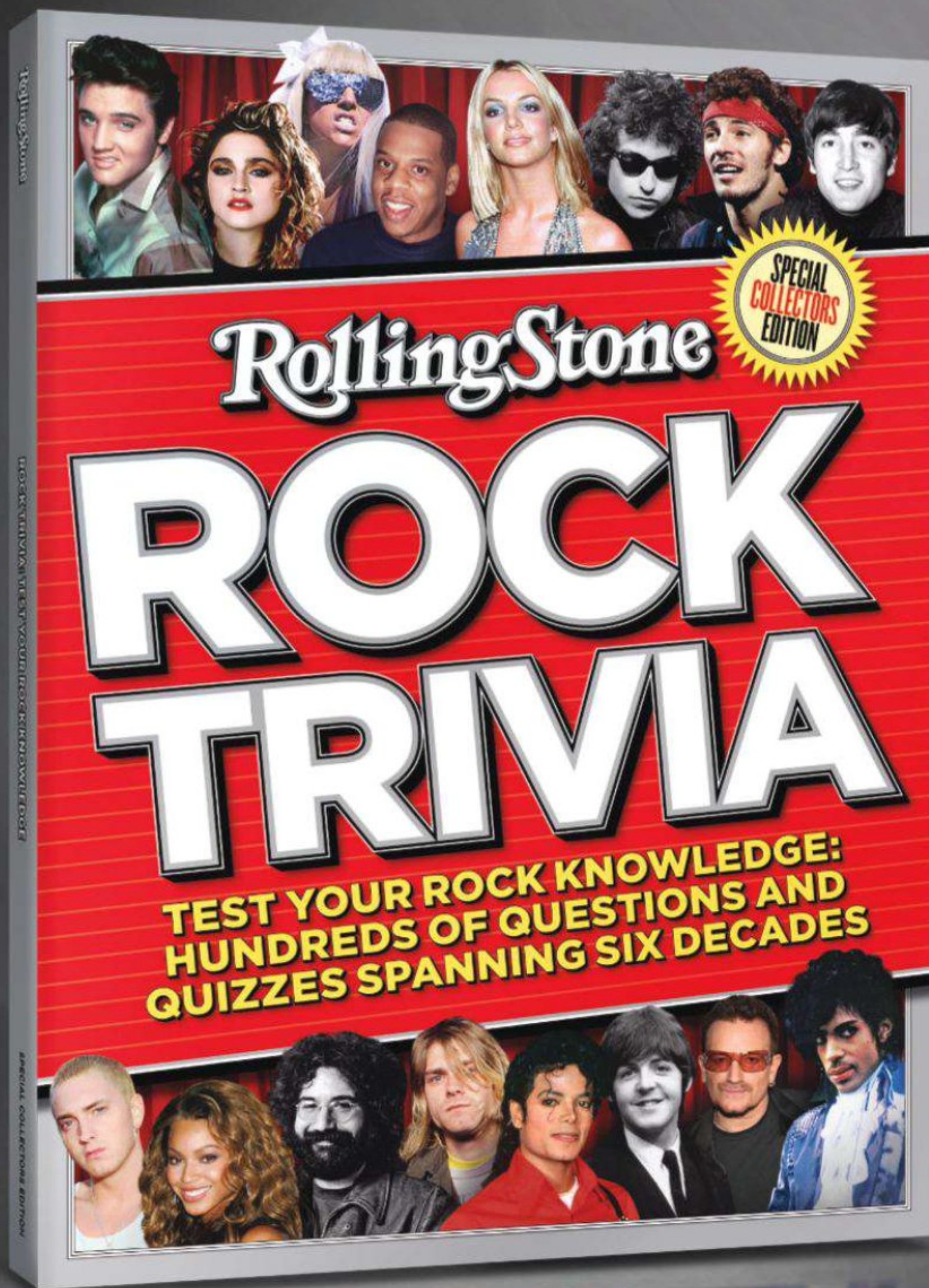
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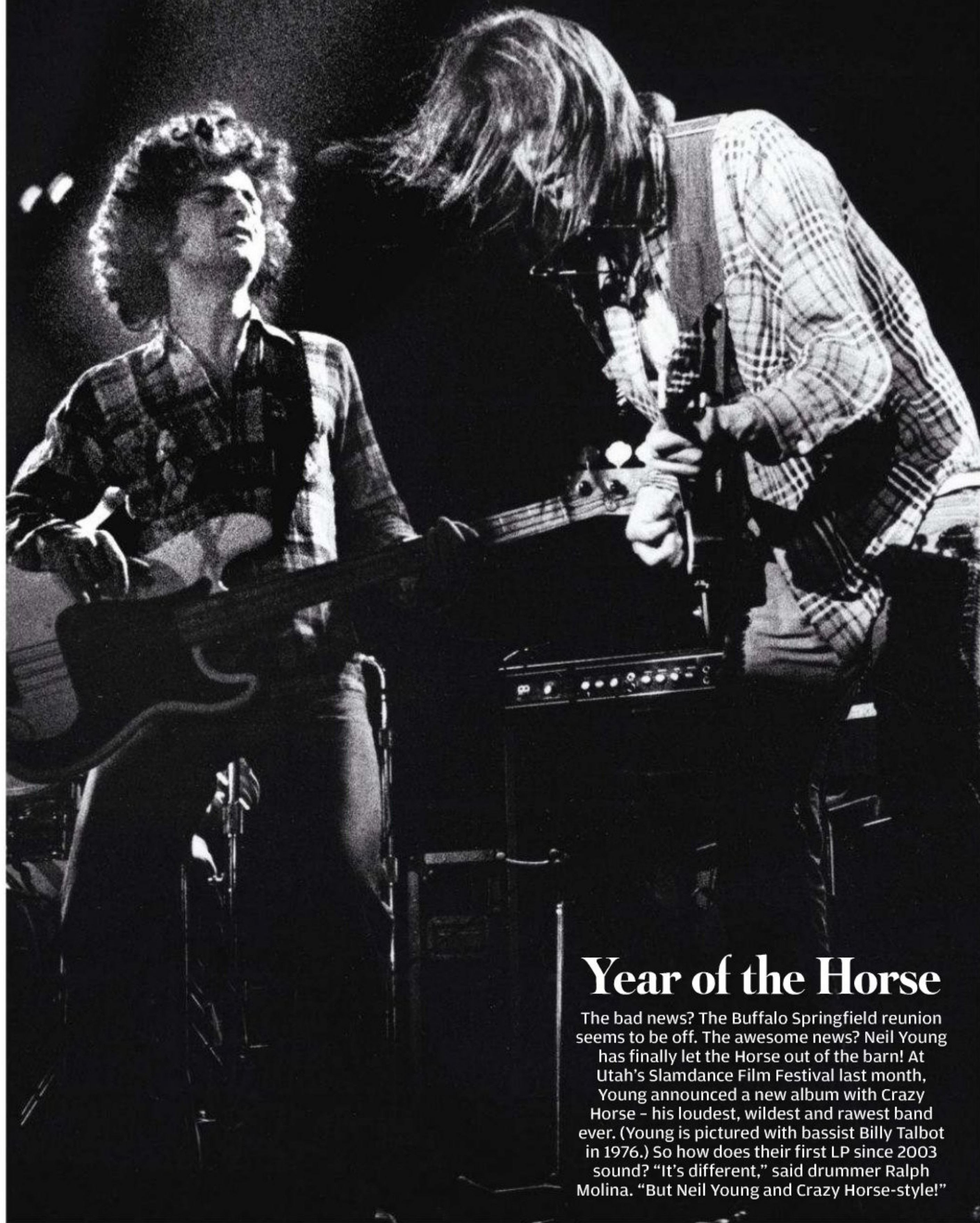


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"ALL THE NEWS THAT FITS"



Year of the Horse

The bad news? The Buffalo Springfield reunion seems to be off. The awesome news? Neil Young has finally let the Horse out of the barn! At Utah's Slamdance Film Festival last month, Young announced a new album with Crazy Horse - his loudest, wildest and rawest band ever. (Young is pictured with bassist Billy Talbot in 1976.) So how does their first LP since 2003 sound? "It's different," said drummer Ralph Molina. "But Neil Young and Crazy Horse-style!"

CONTENTS

ROLLING STONE | FEBRUARY 16, 2012

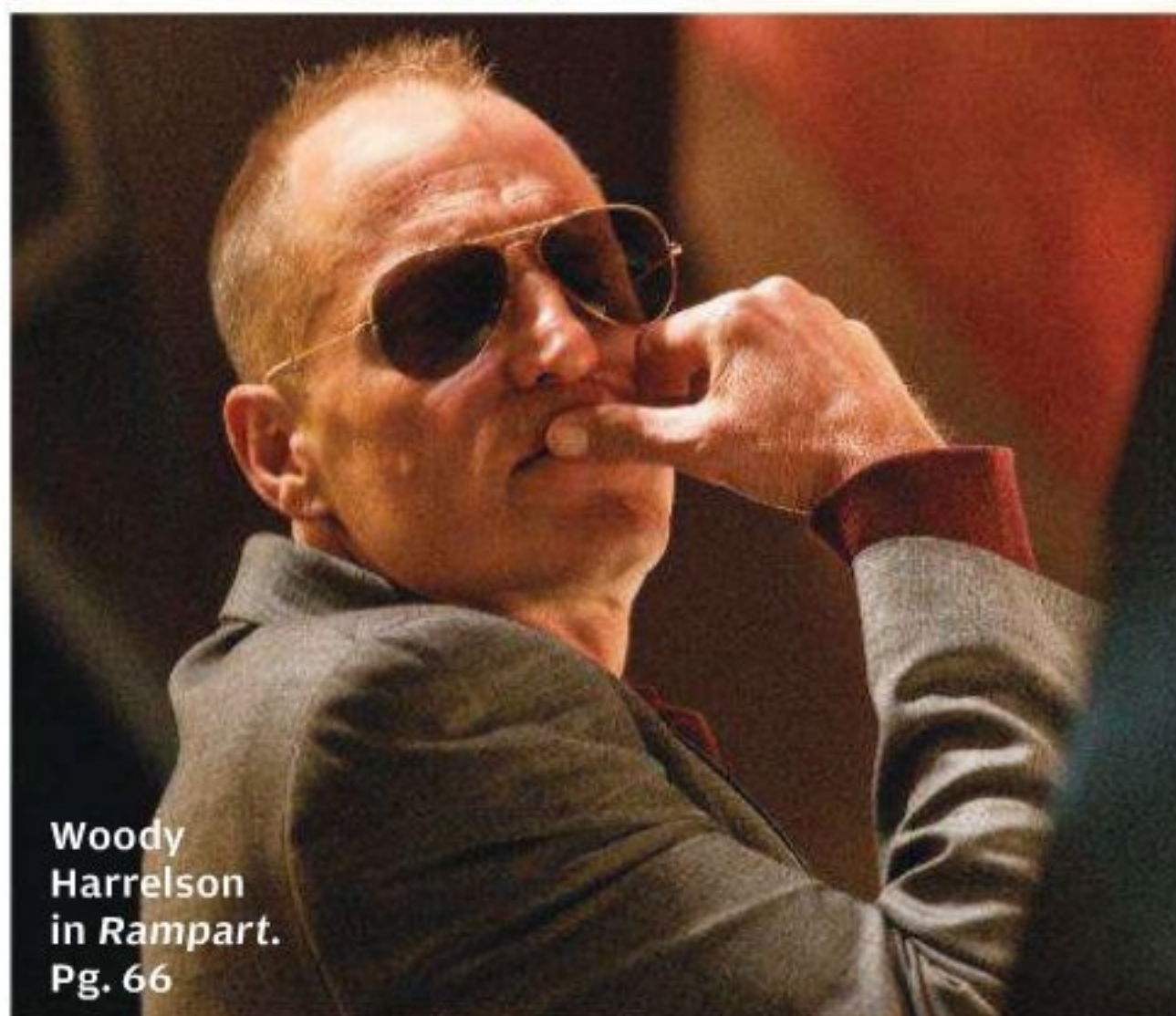
"He was funnier than everybody":
Patrice O'Neal.
Pg. 46



Will Nicki
Minaj
snag a
Grammy?
Pg. 18



Woody
Harrelson
in Rampart.
Pg. 66



FEATURES

Three Men and a Diva

The (friendly) battle of the sexes that drives *The Voice*, TV's most exciting music show. *By* BRIAN HIATT..... 40

Death of a Stand-Up

Chris Rock and Louis C.K. said Patrice O'Neal was the funniest comic in America. But a month after his breakthrough gig, it all came to a tragic end. *By* JONAH WEINER..... 46

School of Hate

In Michele Bachmann's home district, evangelicals have been waging war against gay teens. After a rash of suicides, the kids are fighting back. *By* SABRINA RUBIN ERDELY..... 50

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Mitt and Newt: The Odd Couple

How Romney blew his big lead – and why Gingrich could keep right on winning. *By* MATT TAIBBI 35

ROCK & ROLL

Megaupload Shut Down

Inside the feds' surprise raid on the file-sharing giant..... 13

Leonard Cohen Returns

The 77-year-old master is back with his first album of new material since 2004..... 13

In the Studio: The Shins

Indie-pop king James Mercer recruits an ace session crew for new album 15

Grammy Showdown 2012

Our all-star panel and a Vegas oddsmaker break down the key categories..... 18

Tribute: Etta James

The immortal hits and wild life of the blues legend 26

Q&A: Lana Del Rey

On her controversial *SNL* appearance, boarding school and loving Biggie..... 29

DEPARTMENTS

TELEVISION

'Lost' for Dummies

In *Alcatraz*, J.J. Abrams sheds metaphysical mumbo jumbo and goes for the thrill of it... 30

RANDOM NOTES

Bono Storms the Desert

U2's leader plays Mali; Warren Buffett is big-pimpin' 32

RECORD REVIEWS

Paul McCartney

The ex-Beatle gets his Bing Crosby on. **PLUS:** Lana Del Rey, Bruce Springsteen, Queen... 59

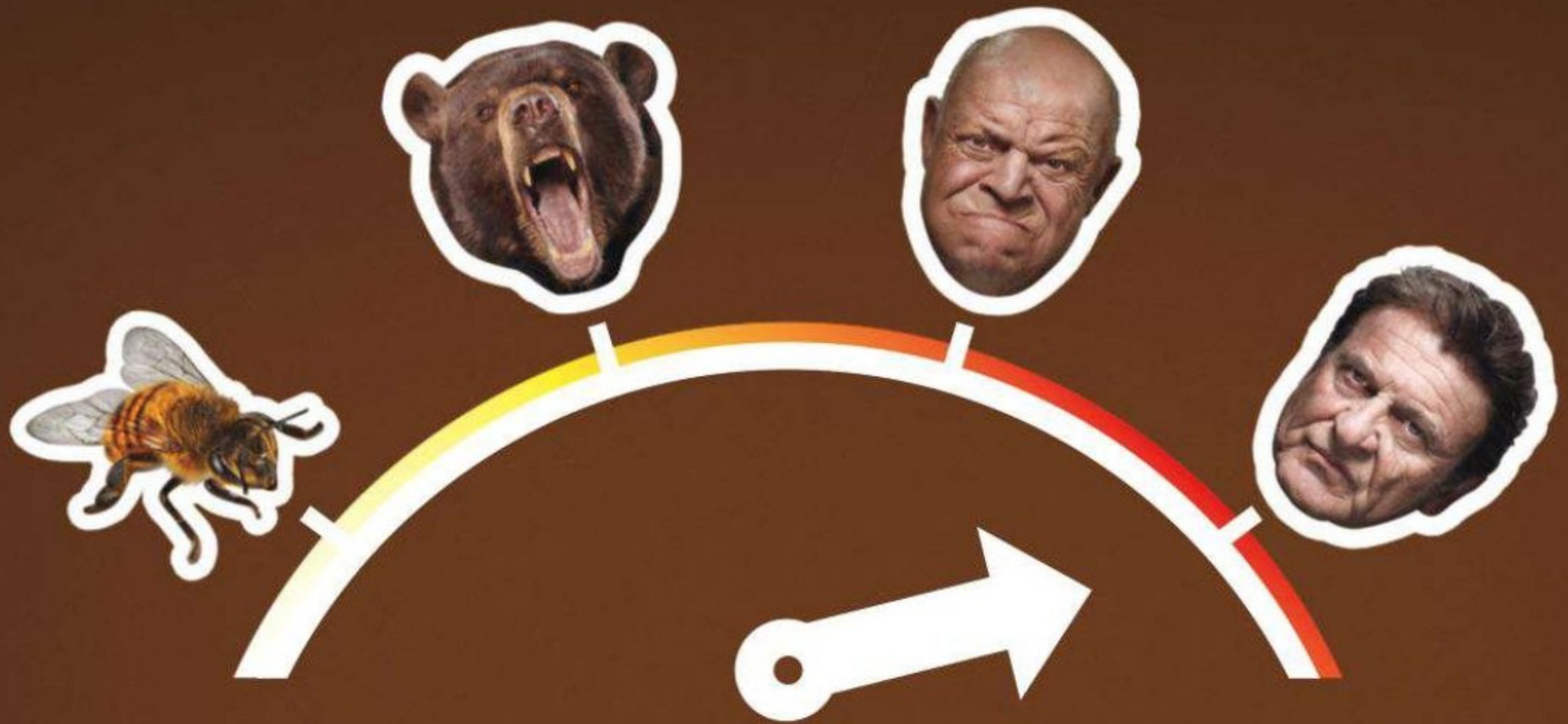
MOVIES

Fall of a Hard-Ass

Woody Harrelson fires up a bruising cop thriller..... 66

ON THE COVER Cee Lo Green, Adam Levine, Christina Aguilera, Blake Shelton (from left), photographed at Smashbox Studios, Culver City, California, December 19th, 2011, by **Mark Seliger**.

Aguilera's styling by Simone Harouche for Margaret Maldonado Agency, hair by Mark Townsend at Starworks Artists, makeup by Jake Bailey at the Wall Group. Green, Levine and Shelton's styling by Samantha Traina at the Wall Group, grooming by Cori Bardo at the Magnet Agency. Aguilera's jacket by S.W.O.R.D., top by Alexander McQueen, pants by Ralph Lauren, shoes by Louboutin, earrings and necklaces by Loree Rodkin. Green's shoes by Adidas. Levine's shirt by Kelly Cole, jeans by Current/Elliott. Shelton's shirt by Southern Thread, jeans by Wrangler.



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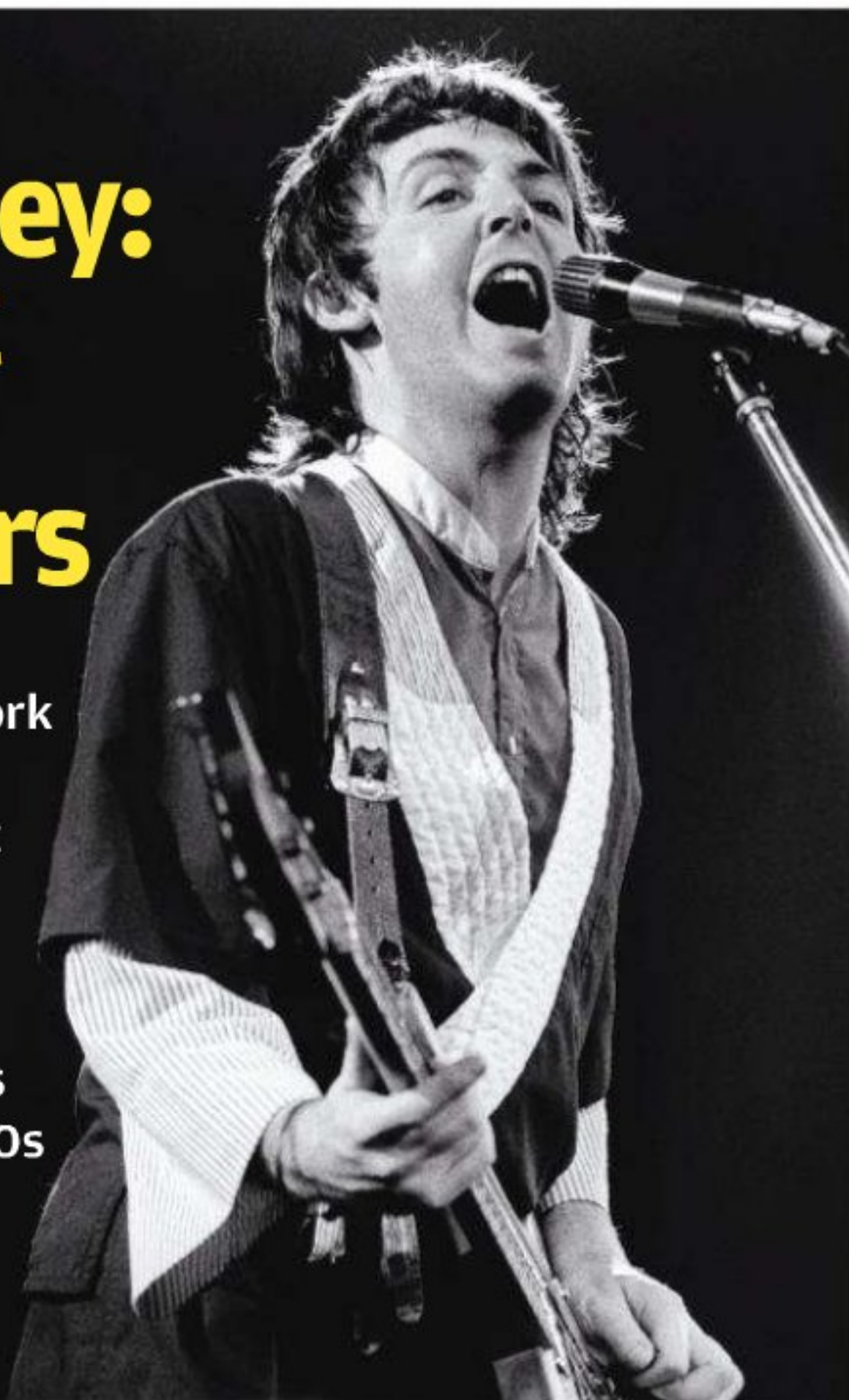
RALPH J. GLEASON 1917-1975
HUNTER S. THOMPSON 1937-2005

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LIST

McCartney: The Best of the Solo Years

At its peak, Paul McCartney's solo work stands up to the Beatles. Here's what you need to hear, pulling from *McCartney*, *Wings* and his hidden gems from the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s.



RS LIVE



'Portlandia' Rocks

Carrie Brownstein and Fred Armisen stop by RS's New York offices to talk up their new season and sing a Devo song.

RS LIVE



Craig Finn of the Hold Steady

Exclusive: Finn plays acoustic versions of songs from his new solo album.

QUIZ

The Ultimate Van Halen Quiz

Do you know your *Diver Down* deep cuts? Can you name any Gary Cherone-era songs? Test your knowledge here.



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Keys on Top

THANKS SO MUCH FOR RECOGNIZING the Black Keys with a cover. "Black Keys Rising" [RS 1148] is a much-deserved honor for a great little band. Only the very best in rock history have been able to stay true to their roots while still exploring new territory. Count the Black Keys among them.

Chris Dortch, Chattanooga, TN

GREAT PIECE BY BRIAN HIATT on the Keys. RS produces their most candid and entertaining interviews. It's good to hear them talk shit about weiner-tuckers like Dave Navarro.

*Patrick Purgatorio
Chicago*

IT PUT A BIG SMILE ON MY face to see the Keys on the cover. It's nice to read about regular guys who are into making music that doesn't suck. As far as Jack White saying he has

a lot more to do with Jay-Z than the Keys, he has a lot more to do with sharing his sister's make-up too.

Mark Barry, Santa Rosa, CA

HAVING ENJOYED THE Black Keys' music for years, I was bummed by their "poor us" attitude. The bitterness and self-involved finger-pointing were just disappointing. I want to keep listening, but I'm not sure I'd pass the test as someone cool enough to be a fan.

*Kathleen Chiasson
Via the Internet*

I HAVE NEVER CARED FOR the Black Keys and never really knew why. Your article provided some much-valued clarity. The duo came across like teenage boys with chips on their shoulders. Yelling about how terrible Nickelback is? Really, in 2012? Claiming to beat off haters with a stick and making them suck your dick? Huh? Meet you in the playground after fourth period, boys.

*Luke Schmidt
Saranac, MI*

IT'S ABOUT FUCKING TIME.

Sureena Mann, via the Internet

PATRICK CARNEY SUMS UP modern rock perfectly. Thank you, Black Keys, for being a ray of sunshine in an otherwise cloudy time in rock.

Ian Broden, via the Internet

The Real Snoop

"GIRL ON 'WIRE'" [RS 1148] is a superb article that articulately portrays the world of the inner city. For the past 11 years I have worked with at-risk youth in the inner city of Cincinnati and found myself ruminating over many of the same points. This article formulated an intelligent and emotional argument about an often misunderstood culture.

Jade Kendall, via the Internet

AS A FAN OF "THE WIRE," I want to thank you for this trag-

"The best bands have stayed true to their roots while exploring. Count the Black Keys among them."

ic yet enlightening piece about Felicia "Snoop" Pearson and crime in Baltimore. I also commend Felicia for her courage – she has accepted responsibility for her failings. I pray she makes it out this time.

Renee Barrett, Bronx

The Good Guys

WAY TO GO IN PRESENTING "The Quiet Ones" [RS 1148]. We needed to hear something positive about public service. The dozen leaders profiled are exactly the type of leaders we must have in this day and age. Perhaps if we saw more of this,

everyday citizens would get involved in creating the culture necessary for real reforms in our political processes.

*Andrew Schaum
West Chester, PA*

AS AN UNDER-20 AND AWARE person, articles like "The Quiet Ones" help me face tomorrow by confirming that there are people in the world looking out for the future of my generation. Keep up the good work.

David Ribera, Savannah, GA

I DISAGREE WITH YOUR shallow profile hailing Gov. Andrew Cuomo as a "good guy." He's Scott Walker light, and a bully. As attorney general, Cuomo failed to prosecute those responsible for the financial crisis. He urged the mayor and the police chief to break up the Occupy Albany protest. They refused, telling him the protesters weren't breaking any laws.

Most people haven't noticed because he has managed his public image more carefully than any politician in recent memory. Unfortunately, the media in general, and RS in this case, have not done their job holding politicians accountable.

Dan Walsh, Rochester, NY

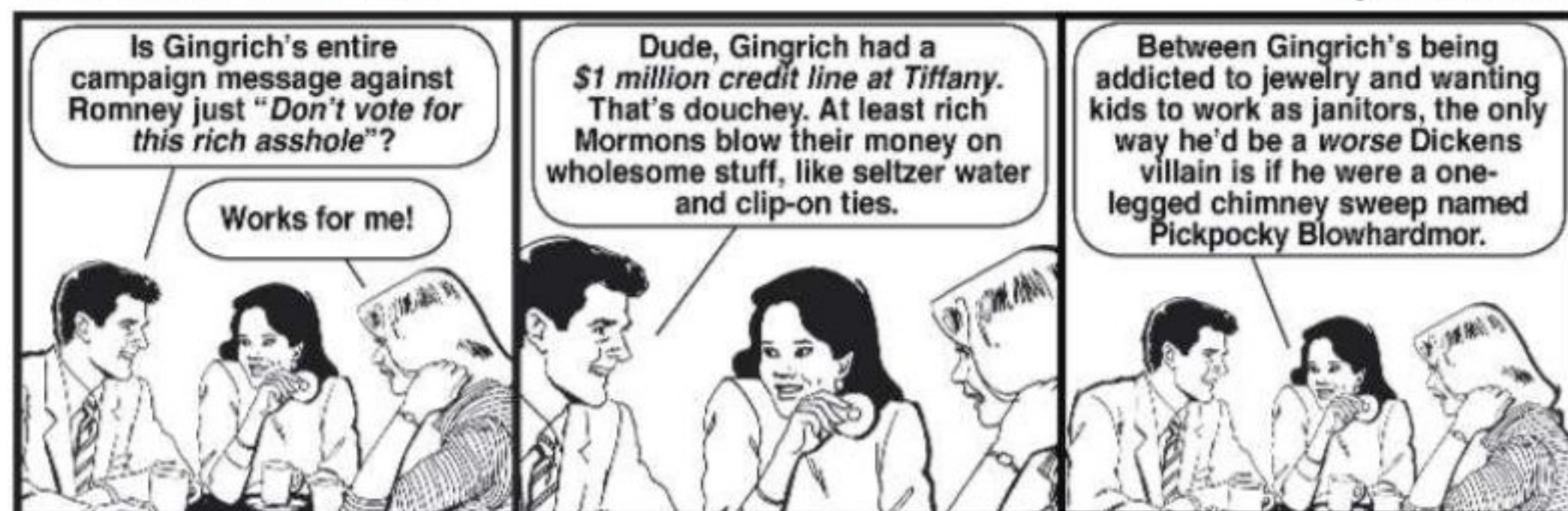
Chaz in Charge

AS I FINISHED YOUR ARTICLE on Chaz Bono ["All That Chaz," RS 1148], something occurred to me. Here's an angle for a reality show that would far surpass all those Bachelors: Chaz Bono as the ideal lover. He knows what women want, and soon he'll be in a position to give it to them.

Maria Mandel, Carmel, IN

Get Your Vote On

By David Rees



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Rock & Roll

Megaupload Busted as Piracy War Heats Up

Feds take down notorious download site with global sting operation

By Steve Knopper

POSSIBLY THE BIGGEST anti-piracy bust of all time took place on January 20th, when a global sting operation led by the FBI and the Department of Justice brought down the file-sharing giant Megaupload – and arrested its founder, the 38-year-old German hacker and playboy Kim Dotcom. “I defy anyone to go back and find something bigger than this,” says a source at a major record label. “This makes LimeWire look like kindergarten.”

Born Kim Schmitz, Dotcom was arrested in Auckland, New Zealand, where he lived in what is reportedly the country’s most expensive private home. Six other Megaupload executives were also arrested. The crew is charged with “criminal copyright infringement and money-laundering on a massive scale” – an estimated \$500 million of pirated content, with a combined \$175 million in income. (Megaupload claimed to have 50 million daily visits and four percent of the Internet’s total traffic.) Authorities seized Dotcom’s mansion and 18 luxury cars, including a 2008 Rolls-Royce Phantom Drophead Coupé with a GOD license plate.

Dotcom, who was denied bail, is in an Auckland prison facing as much as 20 years if he’s found guilty. Megaupload’s U.S. attorney, Ira Rothken, insists that the company was a content-storage site, similar to Dropbox, and Dotcom had no knowledge of any of its users’ piracy activities. “This is ba-



PIRATE KING Megaupload’s Kim Dotcom, whose company is accused of \$500 million worth of piracy, in custody in New Zealand

sically a showing of copyright extremism by the government, in taking down an entire site in an overbroad manner, without giving Megaupload an opportunity to be heard in court,” says the attorney.

The Megaupload indictment came at a time when piracy

“This makes LimeWire look like kindergarten,” says a major-label source.

was very much in the news. A day earlier, a pair of anti-piracy bills – the House’s Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and the Senate’s Protect Intellectual Property Act (PIPA) – were killed after a massive campaign backed by Web giants including Google, Facebook and Wikipedia. In the wake of the

campaign, which involved millions of Americans writing to their representatives and symbolic blackouts of major sites including Wikipedia, Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vermont, and Rep. Lamar Smith, R-Texas, abruptly withdrew their bills.

The bills were proposed after aggressive lobbying efforts by the Recording Industry Association of America, the Motion Picture Association of America, and media giants including News Corp. and Time Warner. The laws would have given the U.S. government more tools to fight pirate sites based overseas – by, say, forcing Internet service providers to discontinue access to an offending website. But opponents claim the laws were written in such a way that entire legitimate websites could be forced offline due to one item of infringing material, among other concerns. [Cont. on 14]

Cohen Returns With Raw LP

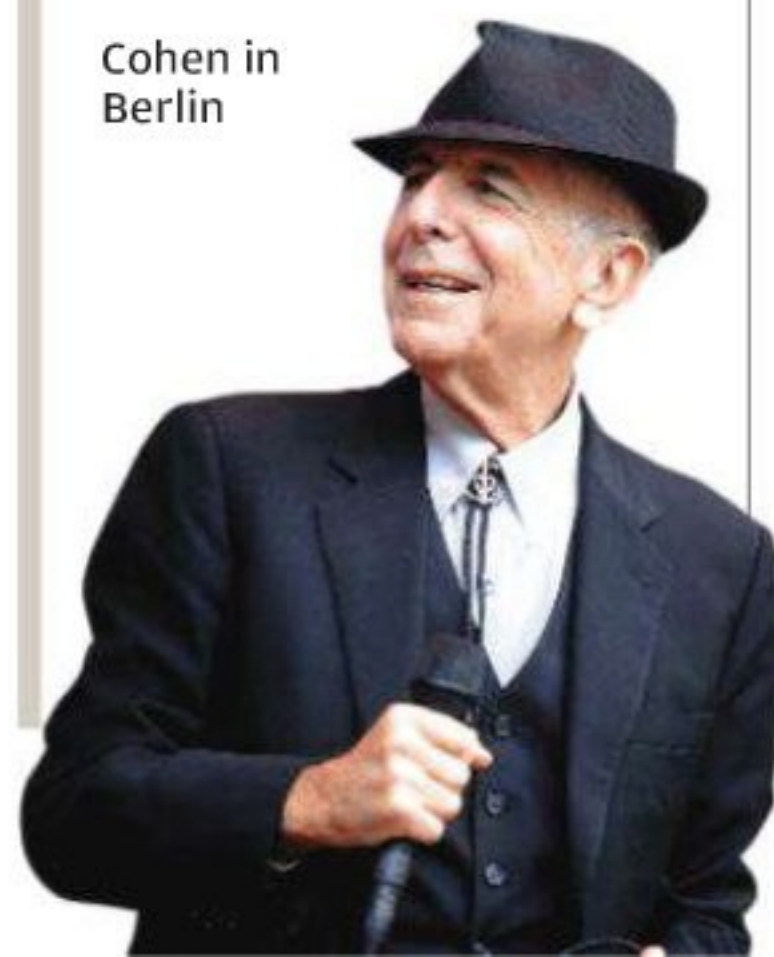
After huge world tour, Leonard Cohen cuts first album since '04

By Andy Greene

IN DECEMBER 2010, Leonard Cohen wrapped a grueling 247-date tour that took him around the world three times. So when it came time to record *Old Ideas* – his first all-new album since 2004 – the 77-year-old songwriter didn’t feel like traveling any farther than his Los Angeles backyard. Recording with producer Patrick Leonard, known for his work with Madonna in the Eighties and Nineties, Cohen set up a tiny studio above his garage. “I didn’t really have a game plan at first,” Cohen says, sitting backstage at Joe’s Pub in New York after previewing the new LP for members of the press. “But the inertia of a tour kept a number of us active. It isn’t so easy to stop once you’ve been involved in that degree of activity, so we just kept going.”

“I figured there was no reason to go [Cont. on 14]

Cohen in Berlin

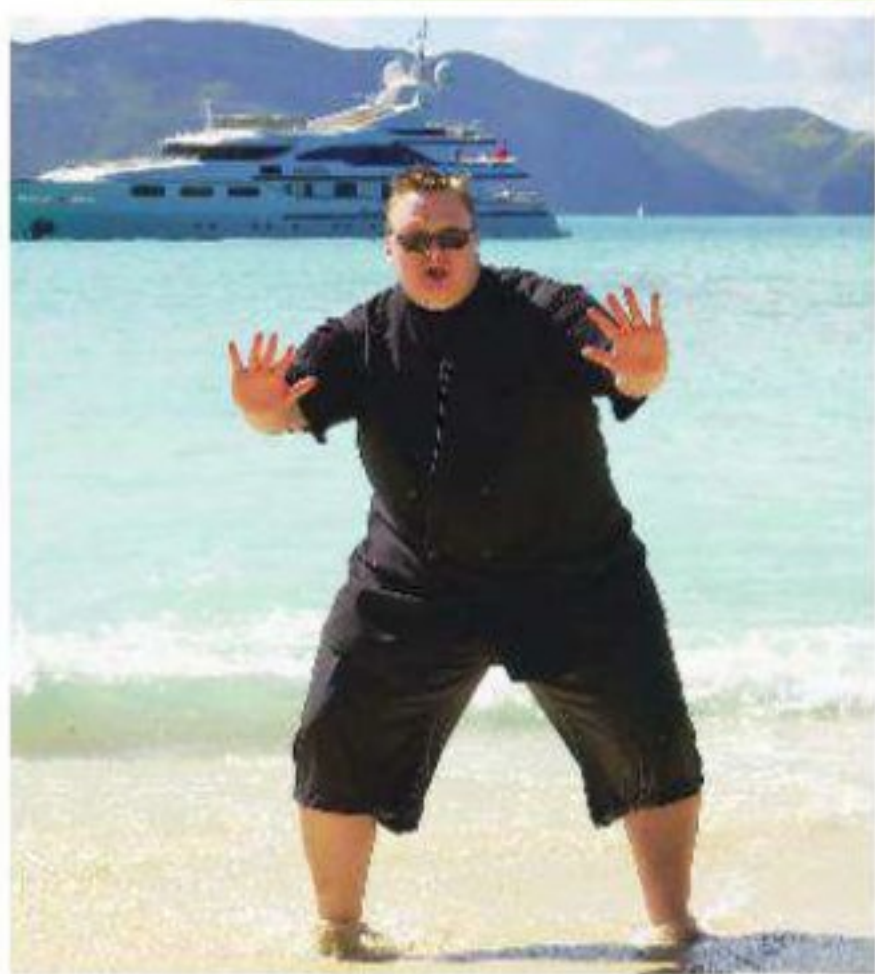


MEGAUPLOAD

[Cont. from 13] "These bills were just bad law," says Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales, whose pages were among the 7,000 websites that went dark during the January 18th protest. "Whatever one's views on protecting intellectual property – and I'm a strong proponent – this legislation would not have achieved the goals it set for itself. And it would have disrupted more important things, like freedom of speech on the Internet." The bills are likely to reappear in a different form, sources say, after the November elections.

In some ways, the Megaupload indictment seems to vindicate the tech companies' campaign, part of which asserted that anti-piracy laws already on the books needed stronger enforcement. Megaupload sold ads and charged premium subscribers for unlimited downloading. Unlike, say, YouTube, the company frequently ignored requests to pull down copyrighted material.

Strangely, Megaupload even was able to gain the support of some music stars. Swizz Beatz, the veteran hip-hop producer who is married to Alicia Keys, consulted for the company and



was considering an offer to become CEO. Sources say the producer persuaded friends, including Kanye West, Diddy and Chris Brown, to appear in the "Mega Song" promotional video in 2011 – which begins with Will.i.am rapping, "When I gotta send files across the globe, I use Megaupload." "[Swizz] is not CEO, although they were in serious talks for him to become CEO," says a



MEGAMANSION Dotcom's lavish life was lived in yachts, private jets and New Zealand's most expensive home.

source familiar with the producer's situation. "They were quite a way along, but they hadn't finalized it."

The U.S. investigation into Megaupload, which took two years in partnership with law-enforcement agencies in New Zealand, Hong Kong, Germany and elsewhere, allegedly uncovered incriminating e-mails; a PayPal account that received more than \$110 million from subscribers; and international bank-account transfers totaling millions of dollars. "The sheer income of Megaupload proves that they're profiting immensely from the works of American creators," says Steve Bogard, president of the National Songwriters Association. "It's unconscionable." 75

LEONARD COHEN

[Cont. from 13] anywhere else for the sessions – that could have ruined the vibe," says Leonard, who recorded four of the album's 10 tracks using only a laptop and a single microphone. (Engineer Ed Sanders and others worked on the rest of the album.) "On some songs, he gave me finished lyric sheets and I took them home and wrote songs to them," the producer adds. "It was like Picasso handing me a piece of art."

Several of the songs date back many years, others were written during Cohen's world tour, and he penned a handful shortly before recording the set. The LP's sound is sparser than Cohen's past few releases, with

minimal instrumentation surrounding his deep voice and backing singers including longtime collaborators Sharon Robinson and Jennifer Warnes. The lyrics revolve around classic Cohen themes: lost love, dark

The lyrics revolve around love and faith. "These are old ideas," Cohen says.

times, troubled faith. "These are old ideas," says Cohen. "Or you might even say, unresolved ideas that are racking my brain, and the brain of the culture."

About a decade ago, Cohen returned from a long Buddhist retreat in the mountains

outside L.A., and slowly relaunched his career. In 2004, he discovered that his manager (who was also an ex-lover) had embezzled all but \$150,000 of his life savings – prompting Cohen's return to the road in 2008. "I was able to restore my tiny fortune within a year or two," says Cohen. "But I decided to keep on touring."

Now he's begun booking a run of live dates to support *Old Ideas*. "Whether I'm going to show up is a different matter," Cohen says with a laugh. "I haven't signed up for it yet. I have two minds about it. I don't like to do a small tour, but another couple of years touring? Is that really where I want to be? Maybe it is. It looks like it's gonna happen." 76

IN THE NEWS

Grateful Dead exhibit coming to Hall of Fame

A new exhibit chronicling the Dead's history is coming to Cleveland's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. "Grateful



Garcia

Dead: The Long, Strange Trip" will open on April 12th and feature five Jerry Garcia

guitars, handwritten lyrics and Mickey Hart's custom-painted drum kit, among other artifacts. "The band gave their full blessing to the project," says curator Howard Kramer. "They allowed unfettered access to their warehouse." In other news, the Hall of Fame has opened its library and archives to the public, giving fans the chance to see everything from personal letters penned by Madonna and Aretha Franklin to rare footage of the Rolling Stones on tour. Located at nearby Cuyahoga Community College, the collection houses 1,400 audio recordings, 3,500 books and 270 videos.

Crosby, Nash, Morello join Occupy album

David Crosby, Graham Nash, Tom Morello, Yoko Ono and Jackson Browne are among the artists contributing songs



Morello

to *Occupy This Album*, due in the spring. All proceeds from the compilation will fund the

ongoing Occupy protests. "Who knows where this movement will end up?" says Nash. "But people have the right to protest, and they should not be deterred from doing that by anybody."

Pete Townshend sells Who, solo catalog

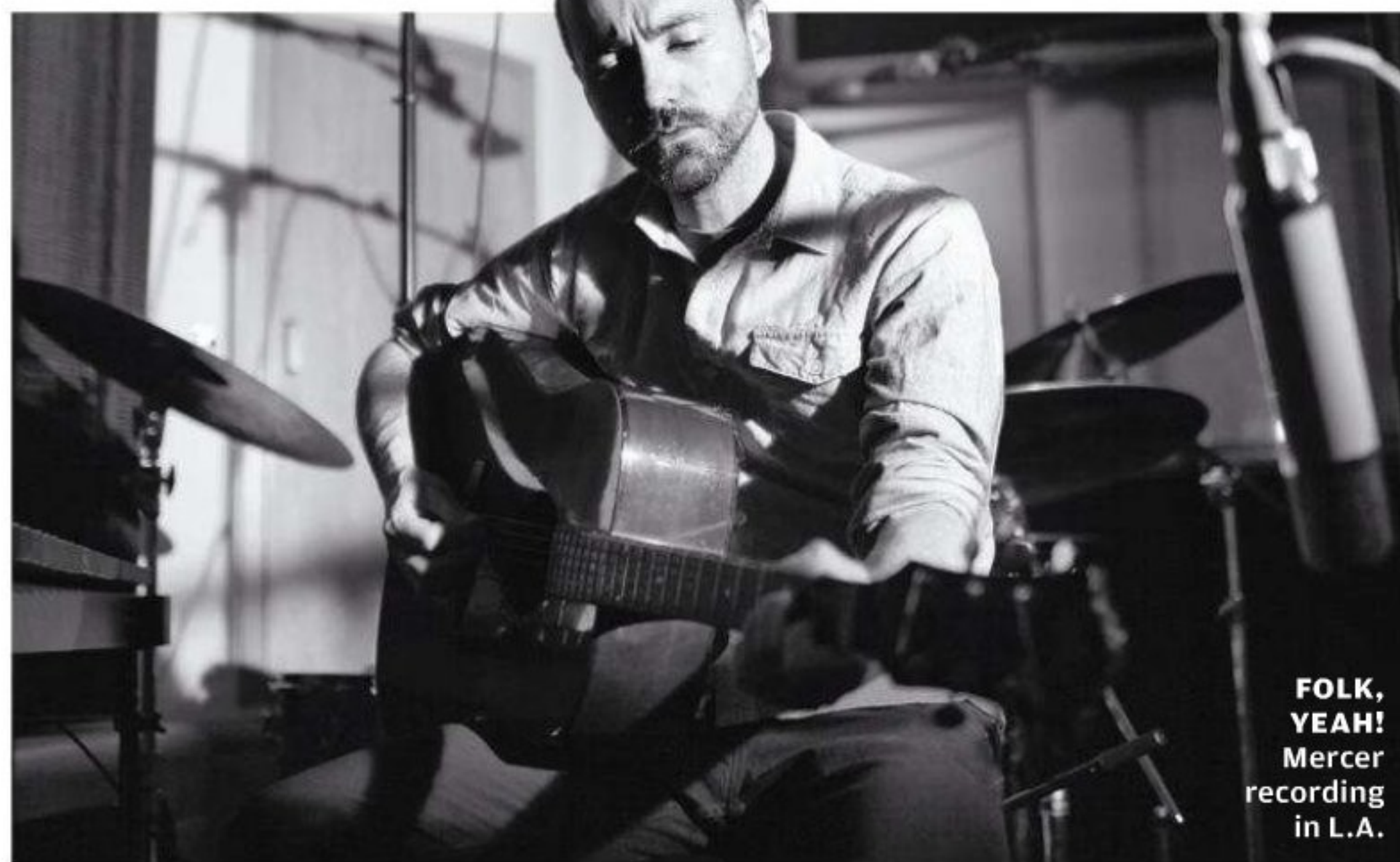
Townshend has sold his share of Who and solo songs – including hits like "Baba O'Riley" and "Won't Get Fooled Again" – to Spirit Music Group, which owns the rights to 40,000 songs, for an



Townshend

undisclosed payment. "The deal provides me with the resources to start all over again in my creative career," Townshend said. The pact also includes a long-term publishing agreement for future releases. "Most songwriters don't get this kind of opportunity," said Townshend.

IN THE STUDIO



FOLK, YEAH!
Mercer recording in L.A.

Indie-Pop King James Mercer Revives the Shins After Five Years

Shins leader recruits all-star crew for long-awaited fourth album

WHEN THE SHINS' third album, *Wincing the Night Away*, hit Number Two on the charts five years ago, frontman James Mercer wasn't entirely sure what he wanted to do next. He took some time off to make an album with Danger

Album Port of Morrow
Due Out March 20th

Mouse under the name Broken Bells, acted in the indie film *Some Days Are Better Than Others* and recorded a bit of soundtrack music. Eventually, though, he returned to the Shins. "I always wanted to have my project be a band," Mercer says, "and not be just a singer-songwriter who puts together records. I'd been working on my own stuff at home, and I needed an outlet for that. And I thought, 'Why would I abandon this thing that I worked so hard to create?'"

Mercer actually began cutting demos for the Shins' fourth album, *Port of Morrow*, shortly after *Wincing's* release – working at Aural Apothe-

cary, the studio he built in the 1889 carriage house behind his Portland, Oregon, home. Last year, he traveled to Los Angeles and played some of the tracks for producer Greg Kurstin, who has worked with Foster the People and Lily Allen. "It was so comfortable, right off the bat," Mercer says. "In the course of an hour, Greg took this loose, folky thing I'd been working on, '40 Mark Strasse,' and he made it sound like we were in Berlin in the Seventies. I was just like, 'You're hired.'"

In the years after *Wincing*, creative differences led Mercer to replace the rest of the Shins – keyboardist Martin Crandall, guitarist Dave Hernandez and drummer Jesse Sandoval – with various touring lineups, and he is now the band's sole permanent member. Still, he says, "I don't feel like a solo artist. I just don't. Everything is, to a large extent, a collaboration."

He spent about three months last summer commuting to Los Angeles to record *Port of Morrow*, working with a cast of around a dozen players, including Wild Flag drummer Janet Weiss – and, on several tracks, Hernandez and Crandall. "They're on the

record," he says, "so they're still in the band."

Mercer says that the essential elements of its triumphant lead single, "Simple Song," came together instantly: "I wrote the lyrics in the space of 15 minutes, on the living-room floor. But I think I jinxed it by calling it 'Simple Song,' because it was the most difficult one to get finished." Even now that the track is out, and beginning to appear on the radio, he still has ideas for tinkering with its arrangement.

On much of *Port of Morrow*, Mercer's famously oblique lyrics have become more direct and personal: The New Wave stroll "Fall of '82" is about his older sister, who helped pull Mercer out of a deep depression after their family moved from Germany to New Mexico when he was 11 years old. And the laid-back love song "September" is particularly important to him: "It's about my wife," says Mercer, who married designer Marisa Kula in 2006. "The trouble I got in was that I told Marisa, 'This is going to be your song,' so I knew the lyrics had to be right on. I wanted it to be a diamond – and I feel like the work paid off."

DOUGLAS WOLK

STUDIO NOTES

Mayer unplugs on upcoming fifth LP

John Mayer, who's been quietly working on his fifth album while he recovers from vocal-cord surgery he underwent last fall, has revealed more details about the disc. "Every



Mayer

new record I start, a new aesthetic comes in," said Mayer, appearing at an event in Anaheim,

California, on January 18th to unveil a custom Martin acoustic guitar he helped design. "What would it sound like if I wrote an album of cowboy songs on this guitar under the stars?" said Mayer – adding that his music going forward will likely feature "more natural lyrics and chords and artful simplicity."

National pen follow-up to 2010 breakthrough

The National have begun writing the follow-up to 2010's *High Violet*. "We are slowly starting to work on a new record," says singer **Matt Berninger**.



Berninger

"We're building a bunch of little sketches of ideas, just kind of stocking them up." One strong contender for the LP is "I Need My Girl," a swooning

ballad that the band has been playing at recent live dates. "It's not loaded with obtuse creative metaphors and stuff – it's about needing your wife or your girlfriend," Berninger says. "That was kind of a breakthrough for me, to just embrace the direct sentimental love song."

Swift's next LP: "Crash-and-burn heartbreak"

For her upcoming fourth album, Taylor Swift is once again planning to turn personal drama into smash hits. "There's just been this earth-



Swift

shattering, not recent, but absolute crash-and-burn heartbreak, and that will turn out to be what

the next album is about," said Swift, whose last set, *Speak Now*, has sold 3.8 million copies. "The only way that I can pull myself out of that awful pain of losing someone is writing songs about it to get some sort of clarity."

Name: André 3000 Benjamin
Style: Van Dyke
Tool: ProGlide Styler

Q: What does style mean to you?

A: It's every person's unique fingerprint. Style is taking what you have and playing with it. Blasting it out to the world and saying, "This is me."

Q: What is your biggest style accident?

A: When I was a kid, I would cut my own hair with multiple mirrors to see my whole head. Or so I thought. I made a mistake and cut a gap in my hair. To cover it up, I used a black magic marker, but by the end of the day the marker started to bleed down my face. I have come a long way from that.

Q: How important is facial hair to you?

A: It took me a long time to get facial hair, and when I got it, I didn't want to get rid of it. Facial hair frames my face and is an integral part of my personality and me.

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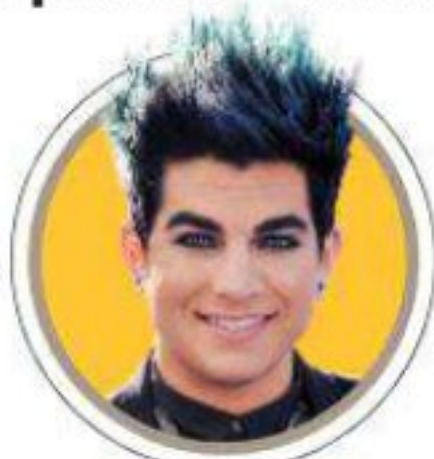
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Grammy Showdown: 2012

Can Adele pull off a clean sweep? Will Kanye win solo or with big bro Jay-Z? Our all-star panel – and a Las Vegas oddsmaker – break it down. By Monica Herrera

PANEL OF EXPERTS



Adam Lambert
Singer



Common
Rapper



Mark Hoppus
Blink-182



Avicii
Producer-DJ



Kelly Clarkson
Singer

ALBUM OF THE YEAR

- Adele *21*
- Foo Fighters *Wasting Light*
- Lady Gaga *Born This Way*
- Bruno Mars *Doo-Wops & Hooligans*
- Rihanna *Loud*

THE EXPERTS SAY

MARK HOPPUS Adele's album was inescapable this year. Housewives, hipsters and people who normally listen to hip-hop all love it.

COMMON I can put Adele's album on and listen to the whole thing. But Lady Gaga may pull off an upset.



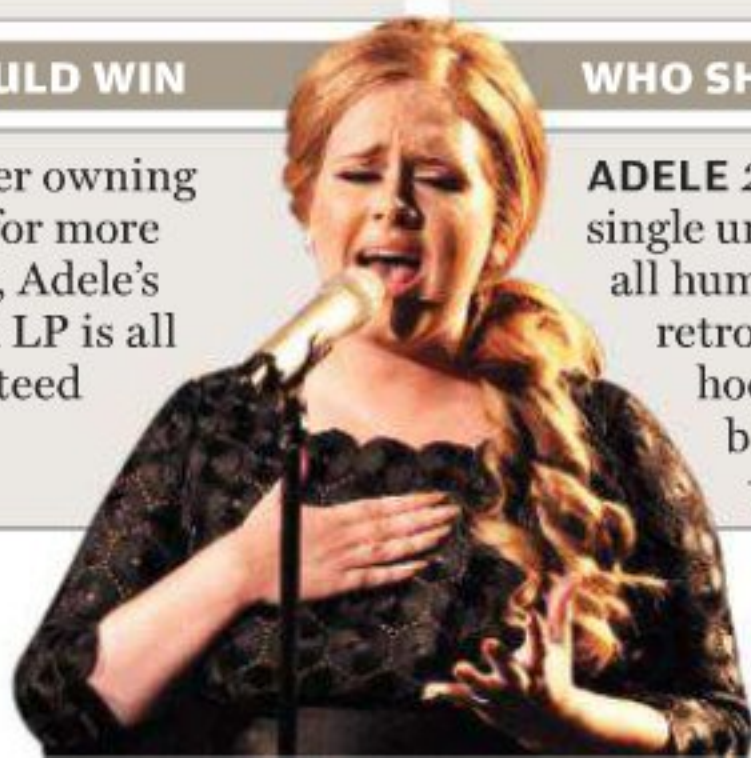
AVICII Bruno Mars had a shitload of hits on *Doo-Wops & Hooligans*, and he's so talented. His melodies really get to me.

VEGAS ODDS FAVOR

Adele 1-2

WHO SHOULD WIN

ADELE After owning the charts for more than a year, Adele's hit-stacked LP is all but guaranteed to take the prize.



RECORD OF THE YEAR

- Adele "Rolling in the Deep"
- Bon Iver "Holocene"
- Bruno Mars "Grenade"
- Mumford & Sons "The Cave"
- Katy Perry "Firework"

THE EXPERTS SAY



ADAM LAMBERT "Firework" is really inspiring. I enjoyed hearing Katy Perry expand her range and comfort level.

KELLY CLARKSON I don't think radio has played a song like "Rolling in the Deep" since Tina Turner. It brings back an old-school vibe, but it's also contemporary.

COMMON There's a certain originality to Mumford & Sons' sound, and "The Cave" embodies that. It takes me to another vibe.

VEGAS ODDS FAVOR

Adele 2-3

WHO SHOULD WIN

ADELE *21*'s undeniable single united virtually all humans with a retro-mendous hook and a soul-baring vocal for the ages.

BEST ROCK ALBUM

- Jeff Beck *Rock 'n' Roll Party Honoring Les Paul*
- Foo Fighters *Wasting Light*
- Kings of Leon *Come Around Sundown*
- Red Hot Chili Peppers *I'm With You*
- Wilco *The Whole Love*

THE EXPERTS SAY

HOPPUS Foo Fighters are the quintessential rock band. They came back with the same energy and charisma on *Wasting Light*.

CLARKSON The Foo Fighters album was good, but Kings of Leon's sound feels a little more classic.

LAMBERT The Chili Peppers album had disco bass lines, double claps and Anthony Kiedis being cool. They're timeless.



VEGAS ODDS FAVOR

Wilco 8-5

WHO SHOULD WIN

FOO FIGHTERS Dave Grohl and *Nevermind* producer Butch Vig delivered a supercharged blast.



BEST RAP ALBUM

- Jay-Z and Kanye West *Watch the Throne*
- Lil Wayne *Tha Carter IV*
- Lupe Fiasco *Lasers*
- Nicki Minaj *Pink Friday*
- Kanye West *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*

THE EXPERTS SAY

CLARKSON *Tha Carter IV*, because of the song "How to Love." It's Lil Wayne doing an R&B ballad!



COMMON Kanye's album is a complete project that's really profound. To go from *808s & Heartbreaks* to that just shows how gifted he is.

AVICII Jay-Z and Kanye delivered with *Watch the Throne*. The tracks sounded really fresh – and I was blown away by their tour.

VEGAS ODDS FAVOR

Jay-Z and Kanye West 1-1

WHO SHOULD WIN

KANYE WEST Let's have a toast for the douchebags! *The Throne* ruled, but *Fantasy* is Ye's masterpiece.





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BEST POP SOLO PERFORMANCE

- Adele
"Someone Like You"
- Lady Gaga
"Yoü and I"
- Bruno Mars
"Grenade"
- Katy Perry
"Firework"
- Pink ▶
"F***in' Perfect"



THE EXPERTS SAY



Mars

HOPPUS I think Adele will get the top awards, and this one will go to Bruno Mars. "Grenade" was a big song last winter that stuck around for a long time. It wasn't a flash in the pan.

LAMBERT When I first heard "Someone Like You," I was sobbing. If something can move you to tears, I think that's beautiful.

COMMON I thought Pink's song was really clever. It's pop, but it's called "F***in' Perfect," you know? She combined the rawness of what she's saying with a catchy melody. It's a good combination.

AVICII I'm almost nagging on about it, but "Someone Like You" is just ridiculous. That vocal shows how talented Adele is.

VEGAS ODDS FAVOR

Adele 6-5

WHO SHOULD WIN

ADELE The breakup ballad to end all breakup ballads. An unsteady heart grounds itself with rocking-chair piano runs and a chorus that bursts with the ache of moving on: "Sometimes it lasts in love, but sometimes it hurts instead." Hurts so good!



BEST RAP SONG

- Kanye West
"All of the Lights"
- Wiz Khalifa
"Black and Yellow"
- Dr. Dre feat. Eminem, Skylar Grey
"I Need a Doctor"
- Chris Brown feat. Lil Wayne, Busta Rhymes
"Look at Me Now"
- Jay-Z and Kanye West
"Otis"

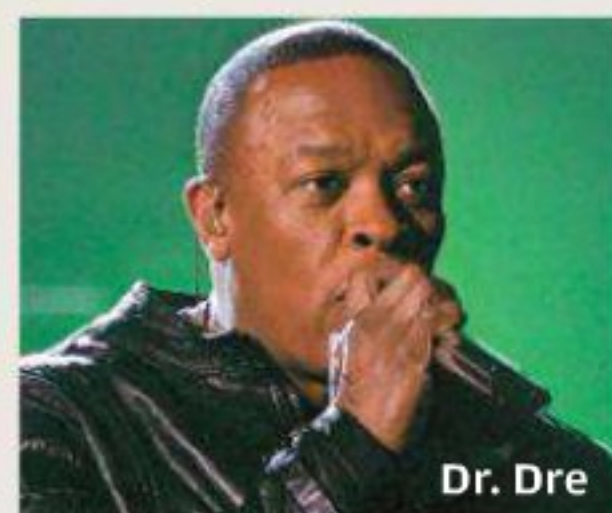


THE EXPERTS SAY

LAMBERT I know "Look at Me Now" is a Chris Brown song, but when Busta Rhymes comes in, he just blows everybody out of the water. It's really nice to hear him back on a track.

COMMON Jay-Z and Kanye took a great sample and just rhymed over it – no hook, no breakdowns, nothing. That's the essence of rap.

CLARKSON My older brother loves Dr. Dre, so that's all I had to listen to when I was a kid. And I love how blunt Eminem is on this song. He gets away with it.



Dr. Dre

HOPPUS "All of the Lights" is undeniable. I might have sung on that song and had no idea. When you release a video and have to warn people that it may cause seizures, you know it's special.

VEGAS ODDS FAVOR

Kanye West 6-5

WHO SHOULD WIN

JAY-Z AND KANYE The inventors of swag take back their title, big-upping luxury brands and vacation spots over a killer sample from Redding's "Try a Little Tenderness."

BEST ROCK SONG

- Coldplay
"Every Teardrop Is a Waterfall"
- The Decemberists
"Down by the Water"
- Foo Fighters
"Walk"
- Mumford & Sons
"The Cave"
- Radiohead
"Lotus Flower"



THE EXPERTS SAY



Chris Martin

AVICII I did a remix of "Every Teardrop Is a Waterfall." I liked it straightaway, but I really grew to love it from hearing the vocal so much. That track delivers what Coldplay is about.

COMMON "Lotus Flower" is another Radiohead song that solidifies their prowess in the game: their presence, creativity and special abilities. Thom Yorke is doing his thing.

LAMBERT "Lotus Flower" is beautiful, but it doesn't feel like a rock song. It's probably "Walk" by Foo Fighters for me. That's a really solid tune.

CLARKSON "The Cave" is awesome. I think Mumford & Sons deserve a lot of credit. They've done a really great job, and they sound completely different from everyone else right now.

VEGAS ODDS FAVOR

Coldplay 3-2

WHO SHOULD WIN

RADIOHEAD The Foos were heavier, the Mumfords were strummier, but no band was as awesomely weird as Radiohead were on this percussion-heavy tune.



BEST NEW ARTIST

- The Band Perry
- Bon Iver ▶
- J. Cole
- Nicki Minaj
- Skrillex



THE EXPERTS SAY

HOPPUS It's so strange that Bon Iver is nominated as a new artist. Skrillex had a phenomenal year. From playing small clubs to headlining giant festivals, he seems to be on everybody's brain lately.

CLARKSON I'm a big fan of Nicki Minaj, but the Band Perry has a good chance. Their song "If I Die Young" crossed genres.

AVICII Skrillex mainstreamed dubstep, which is a remarkable accomplishment. I know him, and his life this year has been insane.

LAMBERT Nicki Minaj is a star. I love how she's really aggressive when she raps, and she has a point of view both lyrically and visually. "Super Bass" was a great move for her.



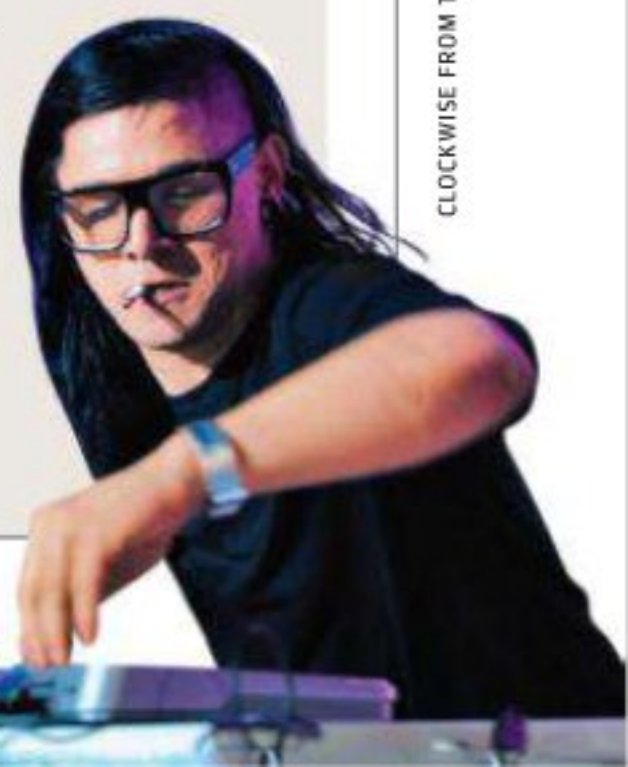
Minaj

VEGAS ODDS FAVOR

The Band Perry 7-5

WHO SHOULD WIN

SKRILLEX A nomination for dubstep is historic enough, but with the genre peaking right on time, Skrillex could shock Nicki Minaj super-fans. He's the sound of now.





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Plan early and make a list of the festivals you want to attend this spring and summer. Check the festival sites for line-up updates, ticket information and helpful tools including free apps. The apps can be a life-saver allowing you to follow headliners, build and share an agenda and view a venue map.



KNOW THE RULES

Every venue has its own rules about what you can and can't bring with. Check the fest site for its FAQ's along with its policy about entering with outside beverages. Same goes for items like coolers, chairs and food.

PICK YOUR QUARTERS

Some festivals are as much about the experience of pitching a tent as they are about the music. Others are more about a hotel stay. Know your budget, comfort zone and evaluate all the possibilities in the area.



STAY COOL/DRY

When packing don't forget to think about the elements. Prepare your stash for rain with items such as a poncho and rainboots or for the hot sun with sunblock, a hat for shade and maybe even a hand held battery-powered fan. You'll stay cool, stay dry and be able to fully vibe to the music.



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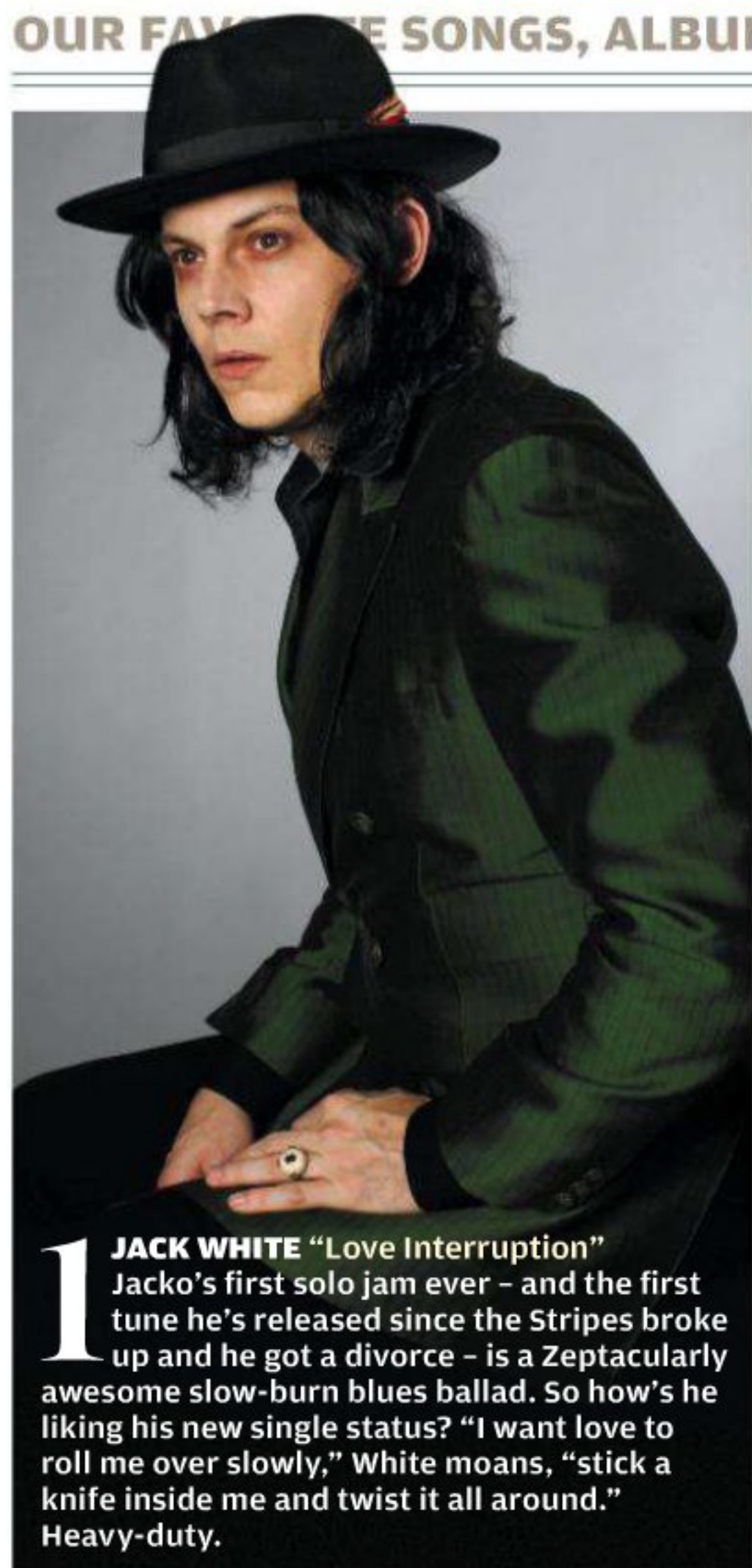
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RS PLAYLIST

OUR FAVORITE SONGS, ALBUMS AND VIDEOS RIGHT NOW



1 JACK WHITE "Love Interruption"
Jacko's first solo jam ever – and the first tune he's released since the Stripes broke up and he got a divorce – is a Zeptacularly awesome slow-burn blues ballad. So how's he liking his new single status? "I want love to roll me over slowly," White moans, "stick a knife inside me and twist it all around." Heavy-duty.



2 ARCADE FIRE "Month of May" live
Arcade Fire spent last year becoming one of the greatest live bands on the planet. Relive the glory by watching their recent episode of PBS's *Austin City Limits*, now streaming online and featuring a fierce run through this punk assault.



3 WILCO ▲
"Dawned on Me" video
In the mind-blowing, vintage-style video for this sunny pop blast – from the Grammy-nominated *The Whole Love* – the band gets a little help from Popeye (who munches Wilco-brand spinach), Olive Oyl and Co. Adorable.

4 BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
"We Take Care of Our Own"
Recession took your job? Gingrich on the rise? Cue Bruce's hard-charging new single, a damaged-economy rallying cry that rocks like "Hungry Heart" haunted by "The Ghost of Tom Joad."

5 NICKI MINAJ
"Stupid Hoe" video
Nicki plays double Dutch, writhes around in a cage and dresses up as a leopard in the wickedly fun clip for her supersnarky single – rocking so many OTT costumes and wigs that Lady Gaga must be getting a little jealous.



6 GUIDED BY VOICES
"Doughnut for a Snowman"
GBV are back! This insanely catchy garage-pop nugget finds poetry in "a Krispy Kreme doughnut as sweet as life can get." Now that's tasty.

7 KATHLEEN EDWARDS
"Change the Sheets"
Even though it was produced by new beau Justin Vernon of Bon Iver, this icy, devastating breakup ballad is the highlight of the singer-songwriter's great new LP.

8 ESCORT
"Escort"
Let's get one thing straight: Disco never sucked. Disco is awesome – as this 17-piece Brooklyn crew proves with its LP of glitter-and-cocaine-sprinkled Carter-administration grooves. Get down!

IN THE NEWS

Johnny Ramone auto-biography due in April

Commando: The Autobiography of Johnny Ramone will hit shelves on April 2nd, eight years after the guitarist's death. The book – packed with previously unseen photos – covers his childhood through the glory days of the **Ramones**, and the battle with prostate cancer, which eventually took his life. Ramone was working on the autobiography in his final years. "Johnny's legacy was so important to him, even while he was sick," said his wife, Linda. Drummer **Tommy Ramone** – the sole surviving member of the original band – wrote the book's foreword.



Ramone

Haggard recovering from pneumonia

Merle Haggard, 74, postponed seven tour dates to recover from a serious bout with pneumonia, three stomach ulcers and the removal of eight polyps from his colon. "Thanks to the wonderful people all over the world that prayed those special prayers," Haggard said. "I'm a new man." He plans to resume his tour on February 28th in Tucson, Arizona.

New Fiona Apple record coming soon, says label

Epic Records chairman **LA Reid** revealed via Twitter that the label aims to release Apple's fourth LP this year. "Stay tuned music fans," Reid wrote. "Welcome back Fiona!" Apple's last album, *Extraordinary Machine*, arrived in 2005 after extensive delays. At a recent show in Los Angeles, she hinted at similar complications: "I can't remember any of my new songs, because they've been done for a fucking year!"



Apple

Aretha Franklin ends three-week engagement

"Will and I have decided we were moving a little too fast," said Franklin, who ended her engagement to **William Wilkerson** after just three weeks. In other news, **Heidi Klum** and **Seal** announced their separation after seven years of marriage, and **Pink Floyd** bassist **Roger Waters** married filmmaker **Laurie Durning** on January 14th in Southampton, New York. Said Waters, "I couldn't be happier."

Hear It Now! Check out ROLLING STONE's must-hear music picks at rollingstone.com/rsplaylist.

A close-up, high-contrast photograph of Rick Grimes (Andrew Lincoln) from the TV show 'The Walking Dead'. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious, intense expression. He has a short beard and is wearing a dark, possibly black, t-shirt. He is holding a handgun in his right hand, pointing it towards the viewer. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green foliage and a bright sky.

THE
WALKING DEAD
RETURNS

2.12.12 SUNDAYS 9/8c

amc

Etta James

1938-2012

The immortal hits, wild life and tragic death of one of blues, rock and R&B's all-time greats. By David Ritz

WHEN ETTA JAMES died on January 20th in Riverside, California, at 73, Aretha Franklin, not known for praising her female contemporaries, called her "one of the great soul singers of our generation, an American original." Her immortal hits, from soaring blues ballads like "At Last" to sacred sex anthems like "Something's Got a Hold on Me," made her a larger-than-life influence on everyone from Janis Joplin to Mary J. Blige. "Etta was on a higher and stronger artistic level than practically anyone," Marvin Gaye once said. "Etta could sing the Sears catalog and make you want to buy every item."

But behind the great music was incomprehensible pain, including years of heroin addiction, multiple arrests, battles with obesity – and finally the health problems, including leukemia, hepatitis C and dementia, that killed her.

James was born Jamesetta Hawkins in Los Angeles in 1938 to Dorothy Hawkins, a 14-year-old prostitute. Her father was one of Dorothy's customers. Etta called her Dorothy, never Mom. Because Dorothy was svelte and stylish, Etta idealized her as a glamorous sophisticate. The mother-daughter relationship dominated Etta's life, sowing the seeds of extraordinary sorrow, confusion and pain. It also fed Etta's burning ambition – the rage at the heart of her artistry – resulting in some of the most powerful music ever recorded. "I saw Dorothy as a distant goddess," Etta told me when we collaborated on her 1995 autobiography, *Rage to Survive*, "a starlet I couldn't touch, couldn't understand, couldn't even call by the name of Mother."

Abandoned by Dorothy, Etta was raised by foster parents and, by age five, was a singing star at Los Angeles' St. Paul Baptist Church, heard on radio station KOWL every Sunday morning. When she was 12, her beloved foster mom, Mama Lu, died, and the preteen was sent to live with Dorothy in San Francisco. "It was frightening to suddenly be with my real mother," said Etta. "She told me that in a former life she had been a white woman with red flowing hair and bright freckles, a powerful and fearsome queen who had put some people to death. I believed her."

As a teenager, she sang in a girl group called the Creolettes, who approached R&B bandleader Johnny Otis (who died three



ALL I COULD DO WAS CRY

"Etta was on a higher and stronger artistic level than practically anyone," Marvin Gaye once said.

days before Etta – see page 27). Otis rechristened the girls the Peaches, designated Jamesetta the lead Peach and turned her name around. At 16, she recorded her first hit, "Roll With Me, Henry," an answer to Hank Ballard's "Work With Me, Annie." "I was a feminist," said Etta, "before I knew what a feminist was. I also didn't know the racist nature of the business. [Pop singer] Georgia Gibbs whitewashed the song, called it 'Dance With Me, Henry' and sold millions. My original sold thousands."

Along with Little Richard and Ray Charles, James became a charter member of the elite cadre of pioneers who transformed primal rhythm & blues into rock & roll. "Good Rockin' Daddy" on Modern Records, a down-and-dirty dance number celebrating the joys of sex, was a mid-Fifties smash. Yet for all her daughter's burgeoning success, Dorothy was not impressed.

"You know the old story about the strict preacher father who hates how his son is doing gutbucket music," Etta told me. "Well, my story is the loose prostitute mother who hates how her daughter is doing gutbucket music. Dorothy thought I should be cool like her, sit on

a stool and sing jazz like Sarah Vaughan."

The great rock and funk pioneer Johnny "Guitar" Watson joined James on several Johnny Otis tours, becoming her unofficial professor of music. "I was nothing but a female Johnny Watson," she said. "When I traveled with Johnny, he schooled me every night. I copied his phrasing. I copped his licks. He was like Ray Charles, singing blues with a jazz feel and jazz with a blues feel."

At the start of the Sixties, Chess Records had made a fortune from Muddy Waters, Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry, and boss Leonard Chess was looking for a female star. James' first Chess hit was the doo-wop-inflected heartbreak ballad "All I Could Do Was Cry." She soon persuaded Chess to let her sing standards, starting with the lush Riley Hampton arrangement of "At Last," a crossover success in 1961, which built in popularity over the years and became the song for which she is most remembered.

And yet Dorothy was not satisfied.

"I wouldn't call that jazz," Dorothy told me. "I'd call it pop. Jazz is Ella Fitzgerald and Carmen McRae. I was still waiting for Etta to sing jazz. I didn't think she could do it."

Along with her standards – “Trust in Me,” “Sunday Kind of Love,” “Fool That I Am” – “Something’s Got a Hold on Me” was an R&B bestseller in 1962. Later in the decade, she hit big again with “Tell Mama,” a Muscle Shoals-recorded anthem that rivaled Aretha’s “Respect.” “Always hated that song,” Etta confessed. “Thought it spread the image of me as a red-hot mama. I preferred ‘I’d Rather Go Blind.’ I gave away the credit, but I really wrote the lyrics. It’s my favorite, a slow-moving story about the end of a love affair where I’d ‘rather go blind than see you walk away from me.’ Man, that’s heavy.”

But her addictions to heroin, cocaine, weed and painkillers were spiraling out of control. “For all my hits in the Sixties,” said James, “the decade was a big blur. Chalk it up to smack. I was a full-time chase-it-all-day-long junkie. We had a bad-check scheme going – anything to score. Wasn’t pretty.”

In 1968, James gave birth to her first son, Donto, whose father, longtime lover Billy Foster, she described as a man who “went from Mr. Wonderful to Mr. Disaster.” That year she was arrested for illegally copping pills in Anchorage, Alaska, and served 10 days. When she got out, she married former soldier Artis Mills – whom she called “a black John Wayne, a big dude tough enough to scare off Billy Foster. Unfortunately, I turned Artis on to junk, and for years, we became Bonnie and Clyde.” The couple were busted in Texas for drug possession and passing bad checks in 1972, and Mills took the fall, allowing James to enter the Tarzana Psychiatric Hospital in 1973, where she remained for 17 months. While there, she met an ex-junkie-turned-counselor, Sam Dennis – described by James as “the baddest therapist of them all” – with whom she had a second son, Sametto, in 1976.

In 1978, Jerry Wexler, who had revived Aretha’s career a decade earlier, did the same for James. Together they cut *Deep in the Night* – which included a heartbreaking cover of Alice Cooper’s “Only Women Bleed.”

The Essential Etta James

“Roll With Me, Henry” 1955

Cut by a 16-year-old James during her first studio visit, it was also her first hit, a jolt of suggestive early rock & roll. “My personality got all over that record,” she said.

“At Last” 1961

Everyone from Joni Mitchell to Beyoncé has covered it, but James’ signature take on the 1941 standard is the definitive version.

“Something’s Got a Hold on Me” 1962

Ray Charles’ “What’d I Say” and singing in church choirs inspired this rousing R&B classic. “The gospel spirit never dies,” James said.

“Tell Mama” 1967

This funky, horn-laced blast was recorded by James after Leonard Chess insisted it was her best shot at taking on Aretha Franklin. It worked, becoming her first major pop crossover.

“I’d Rather Go Blind” 1967

James harnesses the pain of fading love into one of the most vulnerable and gorgeous vocals ever.

By the early Eighties, James had reunited with husband Mills, who was free after serving a 10-year prison sentence, and the family settled in a sprawling suburban home in Riverside. James opened for the Stones in 1978, and years later she sang “When the Saints Go Marching In” at the opening ceremony of the 1984 Summer Olympics. “I’d gone from being a street junkie to queen of the fuckin’ fair,” she said. “It was crazy, but it was beautiful being back in control. I was still battling my weight – I’d been heavy all my life – but at least I was clean.”

When she recorded her 1989 comeback record, *Seven Year Itch*, in Nashville, she took the occasion to seek out Rudy Wanderone, a.k.a. Minnesota Fats, who lived in the city. For years, Etta was certain that the pool shark was her biological father. When Etta finally confronted him, he was a frail old man who could only say, “I don’t know.”

In 1994, Etta recorded a peace offering to her mother – *Mystery Lady: The Songs of Billie Holiday*. “I was happy,” said Dorothy. “Etta’s not as good as Billie, but I finally saw that she could sing jazz. I think my daughter has a future.” Dorothy died in 2002. “Never been so relieved,” Etta said, “and never been so sad.”

James was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1993. Typically candid, she told me, “They got this shit backwards. It should be the R&B Hall of Fame, where blacks decide which white rockers deserve to get in.”

After gastric-bypass surgery in 2002, James went from 400 pounds to 165. “Food became my drug of choice,” she admitted. “I’d tried every damn diet there was. I’d gone to the fatty farm more often than I wanna admit.”

Back in the Nineties, at dinner with B.B. King, I asked the bluesman where he placed Etta in the history of music. “Ma Rainey sings blues,” he said. “Mahalia Jackson sings gospel. Nancy Wilson sings jazz, and Millie Jackson sings R&B. But Etta James, she sings ‘em all, and she mixes them together in a way that you don’t want to hear no one else.”

15

Johnny Otis, Godfather of R&B

‘Willie and the Hand Jive’ star discovered Etta James, Leiber and Stoller

JOHNNY OTIS, OFTEN billed as the “godfather of rhythm & blues,” died January 17th at 90 in L.A. Born John Alexander Veliotis, Otis grew up in Berkeley in a family of Greek immigrants. He began his career as a drummer and by 1945 was leading a 16-piece big band. In the late Forties, he formed a smaller combo, which had 15 Top 10 R&B hits. But Otis was an equally skilled businessman: He hosted his own L.A. TV and radio shows beginning in the Fifties and worked as a talent scout, nur-

turing acts like Jackie Wilson and Etta James.

Otis helped create rock & roll history when he introduced songwriters Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller to blues singer Big Mama Thornton in L.A. in 1952. “She knocked us out,” says Stoller. “We ran back to my place, spent about 15 minutes and wrote ‘Hound Dog.’” Otis produced and played drums on Thornton’s version. “He was a very courageous person,” adds Stoller. “He traveled through the segregated South and stayed in the hotels that catered



Otis circa 1960

to black people. Everybody considered him black, although he was quite fair-skinned.”

Otis scored his biggest hit in 1958 with “Willie and the Hand Jive.” But he never stuck with one project: He dabbled in politics, running for the California state assembly; released an R-rated psychedelic album under the name Snatch and the Poontangs in 1969; established a nondenominational church, where he served as pastor; and played in a band with his son, the psychedelic-soul star Shuggie Otis. “He was a complete musician and entrepreneur,” says Stoller. “He did a little bit of everything.”

PATRICK DOYLE

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Lana Del Rey

On her controversial 'SNL' performance, getting sent to boarding school and loving Biggie

By Austin Scaggs

JUST 36 HOURS AFTER THE most polarizing *Saturday Night Live* performance in recent memory, Lana Del Rey is in New York, eating a cookie. "I actually felt good about it," she says. "I thought I looked beautiful and sang fine." But it's clear that Del Rey has been rattled by the overwhelming Internet vitriol hurled her way after her awkward renditions of two tunes, including the breakout single "Video Games." Del Rey's ace in the hole: her debut LP, *Born to Die*, which blends sweeping orchestral arrangements and hip-hop beats with confessional lyrics about partying and unhealthy relationships. "Now my life is sweet like cinnamon," she sings on standout cut "Radio." "Like a fuckin' dream I'm livin' in."

How did it feel to sing on live TV?

It felt OK. The cast and crew said they loved it. I know some people didn't like it, but that's just the way I perform, and my fans know that.

Are you comfortable onstage?

I'm nervous. I'm not a natural performer or exhibitionist. When I was younger, I hated the focus, and it made me feel strange.

The backlash to that performance has been pretty harsh.

There's backlash about everything I do. It's nothing new. When I walk outside, people have something to say about it. It wouldn't have mattered if I was absolutely excellent. People don't have anything nice to say about this project. I'm sure that's why you're writing about it.

Have I given you the impression that I don't like your music? I do! Especially the song "Radio."

No. I don't know how you feel about it. It's not easy to gauge how people feel

about it. I don't really want to go into it. But thank you, I love "Radio" too.

When was the first time you stepped onstage?

I was the littlest orphan in *Annie* when I was three.

What was the first music you loved?

We didn't have a TV, so I remember seeing Nirvana's "Heart-Shaped Box" video when I was 11, at a party at my mom's friend's house. There was just something about the look in Kurt's eye that made me feel like I knew what he was feeling, like I could relate to him. I still listen to Nirvana most days.

In your song "Blue Jeans," you sing, "I grew up on hip-hop." Did you?

I really loved Eminem. And in high school, my English teacher introduced me to Biggie Smalls. I loved "Me & My Bitch."

Do you have a big record collection?

I'm more of a singles person. I love the Beach Boys' "Fun, Fun, Fun," Leonard Cohen's "Suzanne" and Nina Simone's "The Other Woman." And hearing Bob Dylan's "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" for the first time was a revelation. I watched *Don't Look Back* a lot and read the biography by Anthony Scaduto. Like everyone else, Bob floors me.

Where did you write "Video Games"?

In London. I was with Justin Parker, one of my producers, and I just started humming and freestyling over that progression of chords. It took me about 10 minutes, maybe. We knew we had something special.

It was the perfect song for me – it was me in song form.

In your song "Off to the Races," you mention cocaine, Bacardi chasers and cognac.

Do you drink much?

I've been clean for some time now. I haven't had a drink in many years, but I used to.

Back when I was drinking a lot, I got in trouble and was sent to boarding school. But I straightened out after that.

Lyrics about taking someone's body "downtown" appear twice on the album. What does that mean?

It has a couple of meanings. One is, "Let's go out, let's go downtown!" And the other is... [Laughs] That's it.





LAW AND DISORDER
Jorge Garcia,
Sam Neill and
Sarah Jones
(from left)

'Lost' for Dummies

In his sci-fi adventure 'Alcatraz,' J.J. Abrams sheds the metaphysical mumbo jumbo and just goes for the thrill of it all **By Rob Sheffield**

WHEN "LOST" WAS winding down a few years ago, the networks tried to fill the void with the next generation of big-budget sci-fi adventures like *FlashForward*, *V* and *The*

Alcatraz

Mondays, 9 p.m., Fox

Event. These shows, with their lofty concepts, huge casts, lavish locations and cosmic narrative stakes aspired to be *Lost* but on a grander scale, yet they all crashed like Flight 815. None of them were terrible—far from it. They were just out of time.

The real next generation of *Lost* is the instant hit *Alcatraz*. It aims to be a whole new kind of cult show, the cheap and easy kind: no complex subplots, no flashy special effects, no pristine beaches in Hawaii. It merely has good old-fashioned time travel, constant or-did-it? plot twists, ridiculous coincidences, flashbacks to the 1960s and sinister government figures keeping dark secrets from America.

Not incidentally, it also has one other key thing those *Lost* wanna-be's didn't have: J.J. Abrams. In a way, Abrams has

split the *Lost* legacy in half, between *Alcatraz* and *Fringe*, which is still hanging in there despite minuscule ratings. He saves the convoluted science fiction for *Fringe*, which keeps getting better as it keeps getting crazier, building up its lycergetic fantasies of parallel universes. On *Fringe*, everything is all "You ever notice those little bumps on your tongue? What if all those bumps were planets?" But on *Alcatraz*, the mood is more like, "Yeah, Chief, we ran the fingerprints and they match a guy who died in 1976. So we figure he must have slipped through one of them wormholes. You want the bear claw?"

The premise is simple: In 1963, Alcatraz closed "due to rising costs and decrepit facilities." (Damn you, soft-on-crime Kennedy administration!) The official story is that the prisoners were moved to other jails, except what really happened is that they all mysteriously disappeared. The records were falsified and the truth covered up. But 50 years later, the prisoners have started showing up in San Francisco, where they're killing people.

It wouldn't work at all without Jorge Garcia, the intense-

ly endearing Hurley from *Lost* and the Scooby-Doo in this mystery machine. Garcia plays Soto, an academic expert on the history of Alcatraz who gets called upon to investigate. He has two Ph.D.s, which explains why he's working at a comic-book store. No doubt he studied at the same grad school where Patrick Swayze got his philosophy Ph.D. in *Roadhouse*.

His partner, detective Rebecca Madsen (Sarah Jones), on the

other hand, is clearly an honors graduate of the Kelly Clarkson Police Academy. She's all bubbly can-do spunk, while Sam Neill glowers as the FBI agent (or is he?) who leads the investigation (or does he?) from his underground hide-out. His slinky assistant, Parminder Nagra (*Bend It Like Beckham*), is everybody's favorite kind of secret agent—the kind with an English accent, who always wears three-inch heels, even when flouncing around the hide-out to chloroform a couple of meddling kids.

The best thing about *Alcatraz* is that it doesn't ask you to take it too seriously. The cops are chasing criminals who were officially listed dead years ago, but nobody suggests they're crazy. Why aren't they trying to convince their skeptical superiors that the truth is out there? Where's Fred Willard as the cranky sergeant who hollers, "Time travel, my bippy! I want your badge and weapon on my desk yesterday morning!"

It's that who-cares? touch that turns out to be *Alcatraz*'s saving grace. It has fun restaging scenes from classic thrillers like *Vertigo* and *Kiss Me Deadly*, but it doesn't sweat the science part. If they're the children of *Lost*, *Fringe* is the dutiful older sibling who does extra homework striving to impress. *Alcatraz* is the lazy kid brother who breezes along and charms everyone. You don't need two Ph.D.s to guess which one gets the higher ratings. **7.5**

WATCH LIST

Some Like It Tepid

Smash

Mondays, 10 p.m., NBC

Glee for grown-ups? Is such a thing even possible? It seems like a nutty idea, but then, so did *Glee* the first time around. Where *Glee* celebrates the idea of show tunes as a soundtrack to high school, *Smash* is about the grimly adult theater world, where a London director plans to do a Marilyn Monroe musical. But if *Glee* is young and perky and gay, *Smash* is more like depressed middle-aged gay. *American Idol*'s Katharine McPhee returns to prime time as a sultry little cyborg with hot tonsils, waiting for her shot. It's



McPhee (left) and Megan Hilty vie to be Marilyn.

not much fun if you're not into show tunes, but at least it's not watered-down for the masses—the premiere even begins with McPhee belting "Over the Rainbow." If you can stomach that endurance test, you can stomach anything. **R.S.**

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"She tied me up with a hair band. I thought, 'I'm marrying this girl.'" —Steven Tyler, on his fiancée

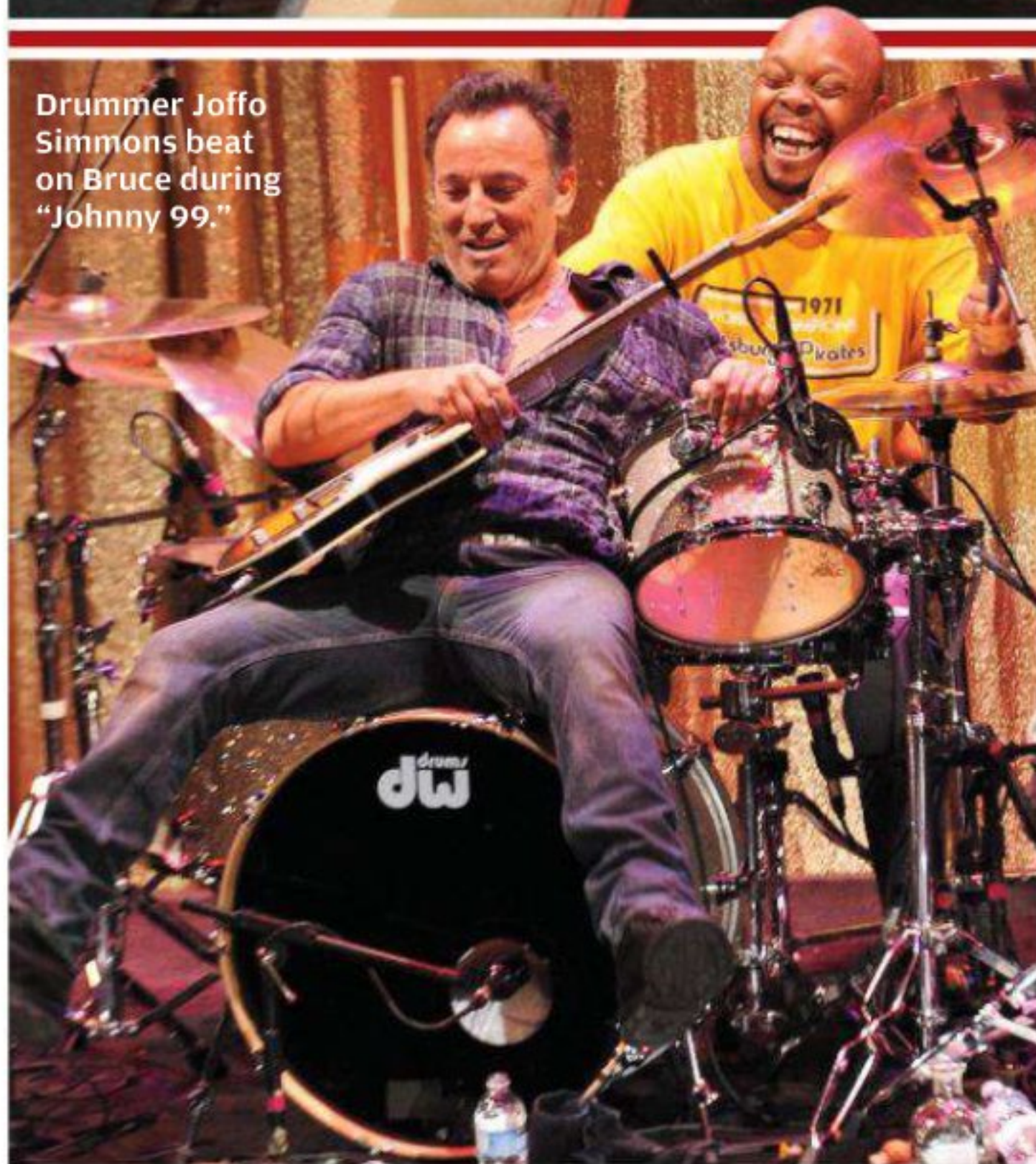
Random Notes

Suck My Cake

Untamable pop starlet Miley Cyrus gave an inspired performance at boyfriend Liam Hemsworth's 22nd birthday party in Los Angeles, getting intimate with a phallic confection. How romantic!



Drummer Joffo Simmons beat on Bruce during "Johnny 99."



Lucky Town, New Jersey

Bruce Springsteen's first gig of 2012 was in - where else? - Asbury Park, where he jammed with Joe Grushecky at the Light of Day Parkinson's benefit. The crowd went bananas when he busted out a solo-acoustic "Incident on 57th Street" for just the second time ever.

TABLE DANCE
Arcade Fire's Win Butler was the main course at a Haitian-relief benefit in Los Angeles.



BOYS' NIGHT
Jay-Z compared ties with 81-year-old hip-hop pioneer Warren Buffett at the relaunch of Jay's 40/40 club in New York.





Beach Bums

Rihanna got "Thug Life" tattooed across her fists last week (a tribute to the late rapper Tupac), but she was living the lush life during a winter escapade in Hawaii, blowing blunts and flaunting her goodies on a paddleboard. Meanwhile, in Rio, Florence Welch slathered on SPF 1,000, keeping her bod a whiter shade of pale.



Rihanna lit up the Aloha State.



Flo rocked some high-waisted waders in Brazil.



ROLLING IN THE AISLES
Still laying low until the Grammys, Adele picked out a trolleyful of groceries at a London market.



Bono and Ali hung with a pal during the fest.

Bono Storms the Desert

Despite widespread fears of violence in the African nation of Mali - stemming from recent kidnappings of several Western tourists - Bono and his wife, Ali, visited the country's famous Festival in the Desert, where the Dublin drifter sang onstage with Tuareg group Tinariwen.



BLONDE AMBITION
Mary J. Blige stunned Taylor Swift with her golden locks at a Sundance party.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ZEUS/APOLLO/FAMEFLYNETPICTURES; CANE/GSI MEDIA; AKM IMAGES; SERGE DANIEL/AFP PHOTO/NEWS.COM; JEMAL COUNTESS/GETTY IMAGES; XPOSUREPHOTOS.COM

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The Odd Couple

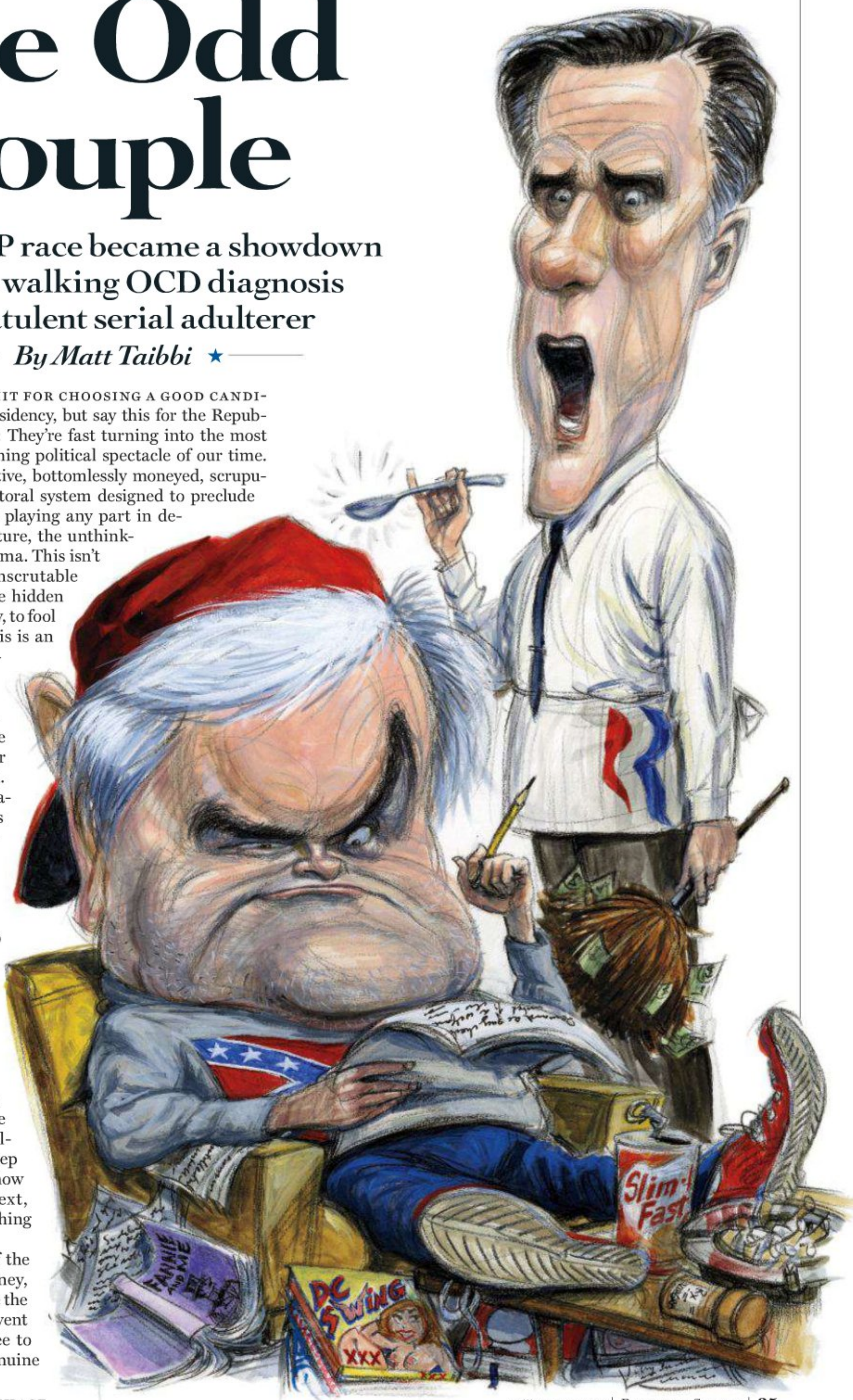
How the GOP race became a showdown between a walking OCD diagnosis and a flatulent serial adulterer

★ By Matt Taibbi ★

THEY MAY BE SHIT FOR CHOOSING A GOOD CANDIDATE for the presidency, but say this for the Republican primaries: They're fast turning into the most luridly entertaining political spectacle of our time. In an inherently conservative, bottomlessly moneyed, scrupulously stage-managed electoral system designed to preclude chance or weirdness from playing any part in determining our political future, the unthinkable is happening: real drama. This isn't part of some clever but inscrutable master plan, put on by the hidden hands who run this country, to fool or distract the masses. This is an unscripted fuck-up of heroic dimensions, radiating downward from the highest levels of our society, playing out in real time for all of us to watch. Our oligarchy has thrown a rod.

If you're not a conservative voter with a dog in this fight, watching Mitt Romney, Newt Gingrich, Rick Santorum, Ron Paul and whoever else is running for the GOP nomination this week try to hold on to front-runner status has been great slapstick, like watching a cruel experiment involving baboons, laughing gas and a forklift. No matter how many times you ring the bell, those poor animals are never going to figure out how to move that pallet of bananas – yet they keep trying, taking the sorry show from one state to the next, over and over, as if something is going to change.

The latest ape to fall off the heavy machinery is Romney, who in a single week before the South Carolina primary went from near-certain nominee to national punch line, in genuine



peril of becoming one of America's all-time electoral catastrophes. The overwhelming expectation was that Romney would roll into South Carolina, kneel on the ball a few times, and run out the clock on the party's yearlong display of manic instability. Heading into South Carolina, he'd raised \$32 million; none of his competitors appeared to have enough cash to keep the lights on for more than a few more weeks, let alone a whole campaign. This experienced national politician, who had run a superbly organized campaign for president in 2008, a man whose very trademark is inoffensiveness and caution, and who for the year has appeared dedicated to saying nothing in public more controversial than "God bless America," needed to hang on for only 10 or 11 more days after his decisive win in New Hampshire without completely wetting himself on television, and the nomination was his.

But he couldn't do it. Less than a week after New Hampshire, Romney committed a series of gaffes that revealed his crucial character flaw: He's a hypernervous control freak who flips out if you try digging around below the paper-thin veneer of his schlock patriotic presentation. The robotic Mormon financier looks like a walking OCD diagnosis, a trim coil of tightly wound energy with perfect coif and tie, seemingly living in permanent terror of a single hair falling out of place. For this type of anal-retentive personality, the messy chaos of South Carolina was a phobic horror. Faced with actual opposition, he lost his grip on everything. At a time when a quarter of the population has zero or negative net worth, when outrage against the financial elite is at an all-time high on both sides of the political aisle, Romney, it turns out, is so weirdly tone-deaf about his status as a one-percenter and bloodsucking

corporate raider that any question in that direction sends his eyes pinwheeling. As his electably boring-mannequin act began to crumble, his carefully concealed true self – a deluded gazillionaire nitwit – was suddenly thrust naked onstage for all of America to gape at.

First he made the mistake, in explaining his income as a private-equity vampire, of insisting that the money he receives each year in speaking fees is "not very much." Romney's idea of "not very much" turns out to be \$374,327.62 – a microscopic portion of his total earnings, but still a number that all by itself put him in the one percent. Then, in the crucial debate in Charles-

Then, as he looked pleadingly at CNN moderator John King, it was Dan Rather time. *Dead fucking air.* Romney's candidacy was literally dying in front of his eyes. He realized that he had forgotten King's original question, which was about why he had called Gingrich an "unreliable leader."

"Now, you asked me an entirely different question," he said to King. "What's..."

The crowd laughed as Romney looked around to the other candidates for help. Gingrich, who despite an utter lack of self-control is a cunning old crook with a keen instinct for combat, moved quickly to drive the knife in. "Beats me. I don't know," he said. "Where are we at, John?"

As his boring-mannequin act crumbled, Romney's true self – deluded gazillionaire nitwit – was thrust naked onstage.

ton on January 19th, he seemed to go into a mental tailspin. With both the debate and the primary slipping away from him, Romney reached into his bag of clichés for an "I'm not from Washington, I'm an outsider like you" speech. Only he ballsed it up: "If we want people who spent their life and their career, most of their career in Washington," he said, indicating his opponents, "we have three people on the stage who've..."

But as Romney looked to his left, he spotted long-practicing doctor Ron Paul. "Well, I take that back," he fumbled. "We got a doctor down here who spent most of his time in the, in the surgical suite."

The surgical suite? But wait, Paul was an obstetrician! "Well, not surgery," Romney corrected himself. "The birthing suite."

The crowd roared.

Romney was never the same after that moment. The next day, in that very building, I watched as the level of panic in his campaign finally boiled over into violence. Throughout the race, Romney has been targeted by protesters from Occupy Wall Street, who have made it their mission to screw up his rope-line photo ops. In New Hampshire just a week before, Romney had tried to do the campaign-cliché thing and kiss a baby – only to have protesters shout at him, repeatedly, "Are you going to fire the baby? Are you going to fire the baby? Are you going to fire the baby?"

Romney typically has not responded to these provocations. But on the day of the Charleston debate, in a small nearby suburb, a protester asked Romney, "What will

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CSIRO; JANA LEON/GETTY IMAGES; YASIR AFIFI; DAN JOLING/AP IMAGES; GENERAL MOTORS; JEWEL SAMAD/AP/GETTY IMAGES; KEVIN LAMARQUE/REUTERS/LANDOV; MARK HIRSCH/GETTY IMAGES; ANDREW HARRER/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES; KASPERSKY LAB; MICHAEL PIRROCCO, DIGITALLY ALTERED BY "ROLLING STONE"

THREAT ASSESSMENT THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE SCARY

Scientist names **horsefly** with golden backside after Beyoncé.

FDA on track to approve first THC drug made from **raw marijuana**.

Supreme Court bans **GPS tracking** of cars without a warrant.

Global warming revives once-endangered **trumpeter swan**.

GM reclaims status as **world's biggest automaker**.

Obama vamps **Al Green** at the Apollo.

WITH US

Washington state to approve gay marriage.

Hackers **correct grammar** on Sen. Charles Grassley's Twitter feed.

Woman completes first **solo ski trek** across Antarctica.

Obama blocks **Keystone XL** pipeline.

One million Wisconsin voters sign petition to **recall** union-busting Gov. Scott Walker.

Billionaire ponies up **\$7.5 million** to fix quake-damaged Washington Monument.

It was the Mormon-underwear version of Bill Murray's "Star Wars, Nothing but Star Wars" routine. All politicians engage in public fakery to some degree, but Romney's plastic-man act is so forced and grotesque, it's actually painful to watch. In this case, the crowd – a small contingent of clean-cut Romney volunteers herded into a convention hall halved in size by a curtain – tittered politely as Romney labored through his hymnal and an assortment of lounge-singer throwaways ("This is a great state – what wonderful people"). When the speech mercifully ended, Romney plunged into the crowd – and that's when the trouble began.

Romney suffers from the same problem afflicting the likes of Lloyd Blankfein and Jamie Dimon: He's been living for so long with the delusion that the way he makes his money is fair and honest, he's started to believe not only that he deserves his wealth, but the converse – that the poor deserve to be poor. He's incapable of sympathizing with people who can't pay their bills, because their condition is tied too closely in his mind with the question of how he made his enormous fortune: If you ask Romney to imagine what life is like for someone who's broke, what he hears is you accusing him of making that happen. (In Romneyspeak, you've "attacked capitalism.") In short, he's a narcissist. They're all narcissists, these colossal Wall Street types – they have to be, because the way they make their money makes moral sense only if you're viewing things from the top of the heap. Asking them to step outside that comfort zone, into the world where the rest of us live, is an unthinkable outrage. It's hard to be likable when you can't even temporarily look at things from the bottom up, which is why it was no surprise that Romney flopped among voters in

As late as five days before the South Carolina primary, Gingrich was still trailing Romney by double digits in the state. His comeback began at the debate in Myrtle Beach, when he had an instantly viral exchange with African-American Fox commentator Juan Williams in which he triumphantly defended the idea that 11-year-olds should get jobs and that black people prefer food stamps to honest em-

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: GETTY IMAGES, 2. DIGITALLY ALTERED BY "ROLLING STONE"; GREGOR SCHUSTER/GETTY IMAGES; GETTY IMAGES, DIGITALLY ALTERED BY "ROLLING STONE"; FOOD NETWORK; LEWIS WHYLD/PHOTOS/LANDOW; BRIAN HAGIWARA/GETTY IMAGES; DEBORA PISANI/GETTY IMAGES, DIGITALLY ALTERED BY "ROLLING STONE"; SACHA LECCA; BETSIE VAN DER MEER/GETTY IMAGES, MIKE FIALA/GETTY IMAGES, STEPHEN KERNIN/AP IMAGES, MARK WILSON/GETTY IMAGES, DIGITALLY ALTERED BY "ROLLING STONE"; NO CREDIT; SCOTT J. FERRELL/CONGRESSIONAL QUARTERLY/GETTY IMAGES, THOMAS NORTHCUT/GETTY IMAGES, DIGITALLY ALTERED BY "ROLLING STONE"; DAVID TOASE/GETTY IMAGES



ployment. The crowd was howling for blood, literally booing Mexico when Williams mentioned that Romney's father had been born there and then, in a moment that one had to see to believe, loudly *booing the Golden Rule* when Ron Paul sensibly suggested that we "don't do to other nations what we don't want to have them do to us."

You could almost see the light go on in Newt's head. He alone understood that during the primary season, one doesn't worry about how some vacillating Ohio independent might perceive one's rhetoric next fall: One carves up the bloodiest bits of red meat and hurls them at the immediate audience, and one does so with joy and a gleam in the eye. "Andrew Jackson had a pretty clear-cut idea about America's enemies: Kill them," Newt said. The debate, remember, took place in the Carolinas, not far from where Jackson's Trail of Tears genocide began, making Newt's remark almost comically offensive. But hey, the Cherokee vote is not a large one, for obvious reasons. The surviving, non-Indian audience cheered wildly.

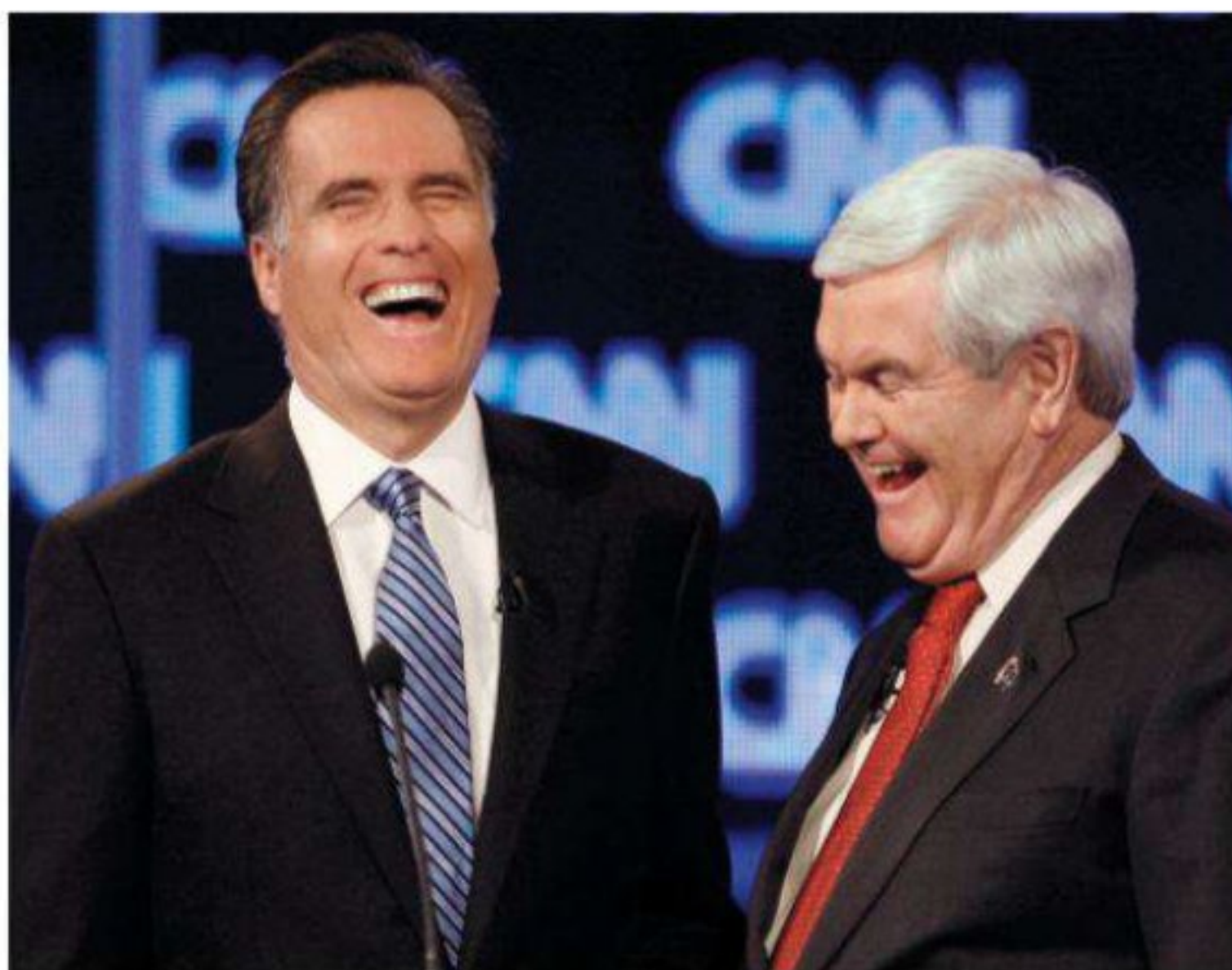
At the debate in Charleston a few days later, when Gingrich launched into his lengthy tirade in defense of serial adultery, the crowd once again roared with delight. By then, Newt had settled on his winning formula: batter Romney over his personal finances, then get in Romney's face as often as possible, highlighting his "genuineness" in contrast with Romney's seemingly constitutional inability to give a straight answer about anything. A last-minute campaign event laid bare this dynamic. By a curious accident, both Romney and Gingrich had scheduled 10:45 a.m. campaign stops on primary day at a roadside restaurant called Tommy's Ham House in Greenville. The mix-up led to much speculation about a "Ham House showdown," and by 10 that morning the place was teeming with placard-waving supporters from both campaigns, in addition to what appeared to be all 10 million members of America's political media. But the "showdown" never happened, thanks to a classically reptilian cop-out by Romney: Despite his campaign's insistence that it intended to stick to its schedule, Romney showed up 45 minutes early, darted through the restaurant shaking hands Speedy Gonzales-style, and was back in his campaign bus 20 minutes before Gingrich even arrived.

When Newt finally showed up, his supporters greeted him like a Roman emperor back from a slaughter of the Gauls. As he strode into the Ham House, his supporters

mocked Romney by erupting in clucking chicken noises. Newt, I'm quite sure, was never happier than he was at that moment in the driving rain and slop of Greenville on primary day. Looking like a king peacock or the mockumentary version of Joaquin Phoenix, gorgeously obese and enthralled with the wonder of himself, Newt plunged through the Ham House crowd, stood on a beer cooler and crowed, "I have a question. Where's Mitt?"

"He left!" someone in the crowd shouted. "He ran!"

Newt grinned ear to ear. "I thought maybe we'd have a little debate here this morning," he said. "I'm kind of confused!"



1% (WEALTH) VS. 99% (BODY FAT)
Mitt went into a tailspin at the Charleston debate - and Newt came out swinging.

The crowd cheered again, and Newt settled down to his usual stump speech, about how he was the only choice to stop moderate Romneyism on the right and Saul Alinsky radicalism on the left. The crowd ate him up; everywhere you looked, you found people insisting they were smitten by the "real" Gingrich, as opposed to Romney, who South Carolinians increasingly believed was a closet liberal only pretending to be a heartless conservative.

"When you're being shaped and handled to sound like something you're not, you're going to sound plastic," said Colette Koester, a financial adviser who came out to the Ham House. "Newt's a real person. He's committed to what he says."

The election-night festivities of the two leading candidates were a predictable study in extremes. Romney's event, at the South Carolina fairgrounds, was a morgue. The floor was half-empty, and the campaign barred some of the press from entering, feeding different excuses to different reporters (I was told I needed to RSVP; others were told there was no room in the hall). In the tomblike expanse of the press filing room, you had to

pay three bucks for a drink, and all they had was soda.

Across town, meanwhile, half of South Carolina appeared to be packed into a Hilton ballroom that began to stink noticeably of sweat and booze long before Newt showed up. Bodies were stacked together like sardines, and the crowd slobbered over visiting dignitaries like Mrs. South Carolina, a busty blond hottie who seemed to symbolize the earnest possibilities of open marriage. "It's like free admission to Wrestlemania," chirped one attendee.

When Newt finally arrived, he plunged into a booming victory speech that used the same tired, redbaiting clichés trotted out by every candidate in the race. (Some, in fact, were the same clichés Romney used, the only difference being that Romney described Obama as taking his inspiration from Europe, while Gingrich also pointed the finger at San Francisco.)

Most ludicrously, Gingrich - virtually his whole adult life a confirmed Beltway parasite, as voracious a consumer of lobbyist money as has ever been seen in modern America, a man who in the past decade took more than 1.5 million consulting dollars from Freddie Mac alone - asserted that his victory was a triumph against the Washington insider. "So many people," he said, "feel that the elites in Washington and New York have no understanding, no care, no concern, no reliability, and in fact do not represent them at all."

The crowd roared, and Gingrich, in a thrilling demonstration of sheer balls, moved on to insist that he'd won the race not just because he was a peerlessly brilliant television presence, but because - get this - he represented good values. "It's not that I'm a good debater," he said, "it's that I articulate the deepest-felt values of the American people."

This, of course, was the final irony: that South Carolina - a nest of upright country church folk proud of their exacting morals and broad distrust of buggery, stem cells and Hollywood relativism - had chosen as its values champion Newt Gingrich, a man who has been unfaithful not just to two wives but also two religions (raised Lutheran, he is currently Catholic by way of Southern Baptist). We've all heard the various sordid stories from Newt's past - the divorce papers reportedly thrust in the lap of his hospitalized first wife, the alleged multiple affairs, the unpaid tax liens, the 84 separate allegations of congressional ethics violations, one of which landed

him a \$300,000 fine. This is a man whose campaign is being fueled almost entirely by gambling money contributed by Sheldon Adelson, a Vegas casino magnate and hardcore Zionist who handed Gingrich two \$5 million checks – two of the biggest political contributions in American history. (Newt, in return, has dismissed the Palestinians as an “invented” people, remarks that Adelson reportedly approved.) There is a distinct odor of corrupt indulgence around Gingrich that may not bother sinners like you and me – but sure as hell ought to bother Southern evangelicals, who a decade and a half ago wore us all out wailing about the nearly identical personal failings of one William Jefferson Clinton, another flabby, smooth-talking hedonist who, in the pulpits of America’s megachurches, was whispered to be the earthly vessel of Satan himself.

But evangelicals accounted for two-thirds of the South Carolina vote, and Newt cleaned up with them, beating Romney – a man whose genitalia has never even been rumored to be somewhere it shouldn’t – by a margin of more than two to one. Even odder was the fact that this hilarious fraud was being perpetrated on behalf of a man who was consigned to the historical footnotes well over a decade ago. After all this time, it ends up being Newt Gingrich? Really? How can a guy who was kicked off the B list in the Nineties be the headline act in 2012? It’s like finding out that Eric Roberts has been picked to MC the Oscars. In an era of popular revolts on both the right and left, it is sobering to think that the American power structure is so desperate, so bankrupt of fresh deceptions, that it is now forced to recycle the dregs of the dregs in its attempts to pacify the public.

THE TWO OTHER CONTENDERS in the race each had good reasons to be shocked by the sudden emergence of Gingrich as the standard-bearer for Republican values. Former senator Rick Santorum earned a place in American pop culture as the nation’s leading pious, finger-wagging bore, the Anita Bryant of his time – he was famous for comparing homosexuality to bestiality, for opposing not only abortion but contraception, for calling it “radical feminism” when a mother worked outside the home. Yet for all his creepiness, Santorum at times has come across as the sanest, most human of the candidates, adopting the exact “Jesus, what a couple of disgusting assholes!” look that any of us would have if forced to stand on a stage next to Romney and Gingrich. Genuinely religious, with a genuinely working-class background, Santorum nonetheless was beaten senseless in the South Carolina polls, receiving fewer than half as many votes from evangelicals as the philandering Gingrich.

Then there was Ron Paul, whose unaccountable predicament was on display in the Ham House madness. As Newt stood in the packed restaurant, gloating over Romney’s cowardice, a small contingent of Paul supporters crouched in the rain at a Hardee’s parking lot across the street, seething over the latest slight to their candidate’s dignity. “The machine would rather have Huey or Dewey or Louie or whatever,” sighed Ted Christian, watching the media blitz at the Ham House.

During the past two election cycles, Paul supporters have literally been forced to party-crash other candidates’ events in order to get their message out. In this case, Christian and his friend Michael Toppeta decided to blitz the “Ham House showdown” by showing off a pair of spiffy “Ron

Newt was never happier than he was at that moment, in the driving rain and slop of Greenville on primary day.

Paul 2012” campaign vans – one featuring a professional paint-and-stencil job, the other a pleasingly Mystery Machine-esque vehicle done up with \$3 worth of finger paint from Michaels.

“It’s a fiscally responsible design job,” Christian proudly declared.

“I just wanted to show that we can do a professional job like that,” Toppeta added, regarding the more high-end van. “That we’re not just a bunch of hippies or whatever.”

Both actually and metaphorically, the Paul campaign is forever being consigned to the parking lot outside the main event, despite the fact that Paul is the only Republican candidate with consistent, insoluble support across the country. Polls also show that Paul tends to fare much better against Obama than any candidate besides Romney: A recent CNN poll showed him in a dead heat with Obama in a one-on-one contest. Yet everywhere he goes, Paul is hounded by reporters asking him which of the other mannequins he’s eventually going to throw his support to. The grown-ups in the party establishment and their lackeys in the press simply refuse to take Paul seriously, which is part of the reason Paul is so extraordinarily attractive to young people (in both Iowa and New Hampshire, he scored almost *half* of the under-30 vote).

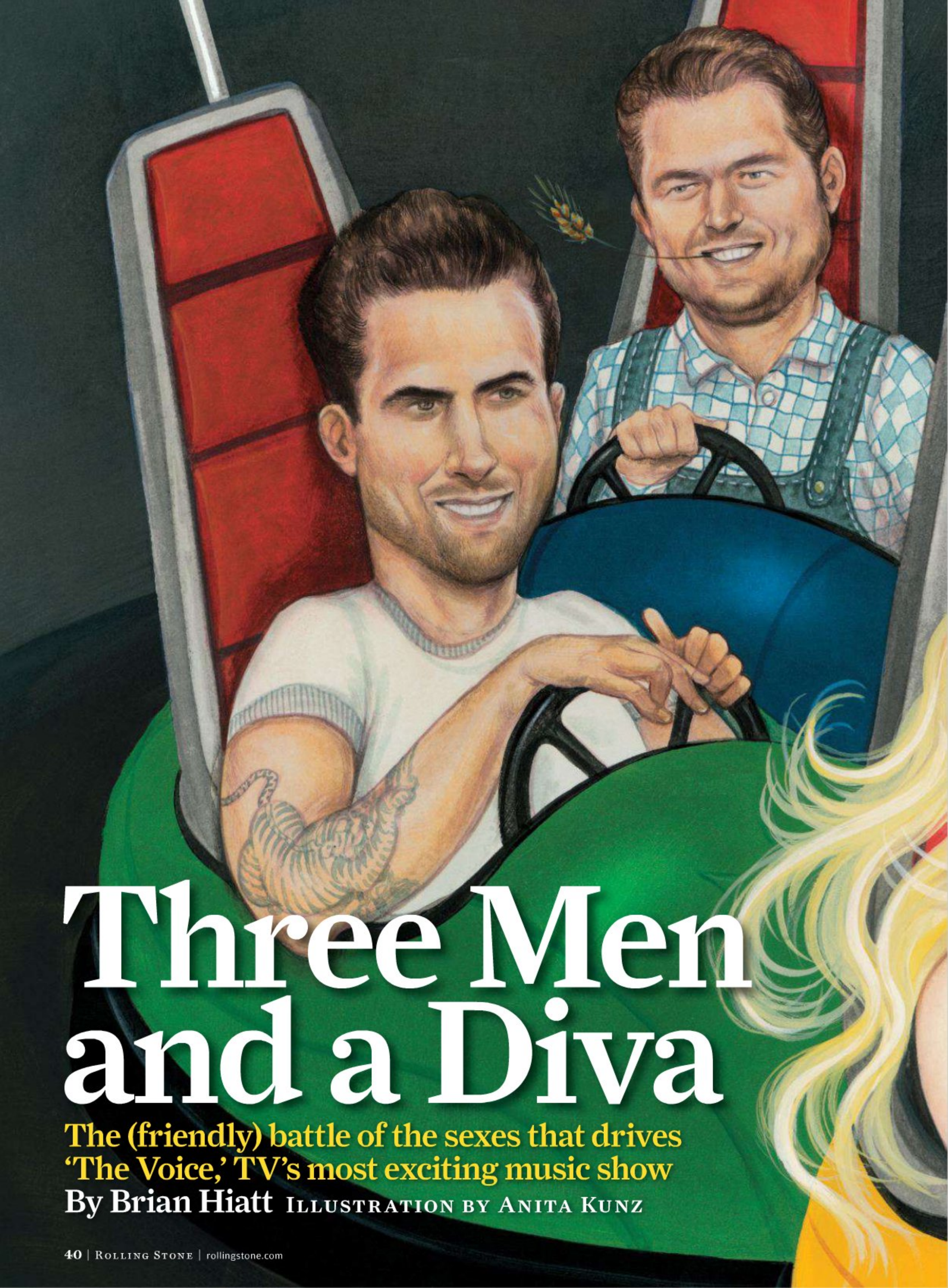
But the Republican Party is not dominated by 22-year-old college students reading *The Fountainhead* for the first

time and finally understanding what it is they’ve always hated about their ex-hippie parents. No, the party is dominated by middle-aged white suburbanites who hate Mexico, John King and the Golden Rule and are willing to flock to anyone who’ll serve up the Fox News culture war in big portions and without shame or hesitation. Romney might have memorized a few I-hate-Obama sound bites, but voters simply don’t believe him. Gingrich alone offers GOP voters the emotional payoff they want out of an election – an impassioned fight against the conspiracy, played out in thrillingly contrary three-hour debates on health care with the liberal Satan. Gingrich lives for confrontation: He was born for this sort of insurgent primary politics.

The only problem is, he’s a bloviating, egomaniacal hog clinging to a third marriage who suffers from incurable diarrhea of the mouth and, according to polls, is one of the most intensely disliked politicians in America, making him an utterly absurd choice for the general election. If Gingrich ends up winning the nomination, Obama will essentially be running against the political version of Gilbert Gottfried or raw garlic – strong tastes that some like quite a lot, but many more can’t stand to even be near. If that happens, every Democratic flack from Leon Panetta to Obama himself will have to wear restraints to keep from publicly crying out in joy.

All of which makes the goofball theater surrounding the GOP primaries seem even crazier. With a weak economy and a vulnerable president in the White House, the Republican Party had a real chance to re-seize power, if it could only have grasped the gravity of the situation and put forward a plausible candidate. And a plausible candidate would have been better for everyone, not just Republicans, because the nation will suffer when Obama cruises to victory next fall on a sea of open-marriage jokes, instead of having to face a cogent argument against useless bailouts, endless wars and economic mismanagement.

But the GOP chose to snub any semblance of substance, floating one candidate after another – from Donald Trump and Michele Bachmann to Herman Cain and Rick Perry – who could not hold on to the lead for more than a few hours before tripping and falling into the machinery. It now appears that whoever winds up winning the Republican nomination will be a reform-hating friend of the one percent who will happily gobble whatever hundreds of millions of dollars Wall Street has left over to donate to the GOP, after it’s finished lavishing its election-year tribute on Barack Obama. The best we can hope for, it appears, is some truly high-quality reality-show drama. The campaign is a circus like we’ve never seen before. We may get worse candidates, but at least we’re getting a better show.



Three Men and a Diva

The (friendly) battle of the sexes that drives
'The Voice,' TV's most exciting music show

By Brian Hiatt ILLUSTRATION BY ANITA KUNZ





AT ITS HEART, "THE VOICE" IS A GAME show, and the most essential rules that guide its coaches are unspoken: Try not to wince when blind auditions trick you into picking an unsightly singer; always declare it "heartbreaking" to choose the winner of a vocal battle, no matter how easy the decision actually is; and most important, never, ever interrupt Christina Aguilera when she is speaking. ★ One late afternoon in a quiet backroom of a Los Angeles photo studio, Aguilera is curled up, barefoot, on a

white couch next to fellow coaches Adam Levine and Blake Shelton. She's sipping an iced coffee and holding forth on the greatness of the team of singers she's assembled for *The Voice's* second season, which begins February 5th in a prime post-Super Bowl slot: "In one of my battles," she says, "this girl and guy are doing Nirvana's 'Heart-Shaped Box,' and I'm not sure if people would even expect that from me...."

At that, Cee Lo Green – who's been splayed diagonally in a leather chair off to the side, in deep communion with the ceiling – snaps to attention and begins singing Kurt Cobain's melody in his high voice: "Hey, wait/I've got a new complaint...."

Aguilera flares up like a sexy puffer fish, swiveling her bleach-blond head in his direction, red lips pursed, blue eyes blazing with imperial annoyance. "Yes, Cee Lo," she says, as if she's talking to her four-year-old son. "This is my floor here!"

He stops singing, and Aguilera laughs, already over it: "You wake him up and now he's interrupting everybody's shit!"

The unlikely stars of *The Voice* – last season's highest-rated NBC entertainment show – have a surprisingly warm off-camera rapport for four people who have no real business being in a room together. "Just look at the four of us," says Levine. "It's just so wrong and so amazing."

As widespread gossip would have it, the other three supposedly resent Aguilera for various alleged sins, including tardiness, imperiousness and earning more money than them – but there's not much evidence of that today. "'Supposedly' is the key word," Aguilera says, with a big laugh. Levine and Shelton just attended Aguilera's 31st birthday party at a Hollywood bowling alley; Cee Lo skipped it only because he was out of town.

They spend a lot of time teasing one another. Oklahoma native Shelton – a singer with 10 Number One country hits to his name but little recognition outside his genre before *The Voice* debuted last April – is a frequent target of hick jokes. Shelton,

35, has been on an Eighties kick lately, so he plays Young MC's "Bust a Move" on his iPhone's tinny speakers. Says Levine, "Blake thinks this song came out two weeks ago." But they're also jealous of his cowboy cool: "Blake can say anything or do anything," Levine adds. "If I was like, 'I'm drunk at 4:00!' I'd be attacked. He's like, 'It's cool, fuck you, I just shot a fucking moose, kiss my ass!' He can say whatever he wants."

Cee Lo, 37, is the designated oddball, the ruler and sole inhabitant of what Shelton calls "Cee Lo Land." At the moment, he's wearing a black tank top and long black shorts, plus sandals over white socks. "He can wear white socks with sandals and still have it be fucking cool," says Levine. "If I did that, Blake would make fun of me."

If Aguilera occasionally has to go full diva, on-camera or off-, she sees it as the only way to hold her own. "You have to be a pretty strong girl to stay up in the mix with the guys," she says. "It's a lot. It's a crazy locker-room kind of situation."

Levine, his tattooed, yoga-toned arms exposed by a sleeveless shirt, turns to

Aguilera. "I honestly just recently started realizing that you're surrounded by three dudes all the time, and that has to be something of a pain in the ass," he says. But they've made some concessions: "We stopped farting in front of her!"

Aguilera rolls her eyes: "You had a nasty burp at the Super Bowl commercial, though."



ESIDES ONIONS, TOMATOES and marijuana, the Netherlands' biggest cash crop may well be reality shows. *Big Brother* and *Fear Factor* both started

there before spreading around the world, and in 2010, the creator of those shows, the very wealthy John de Mol, introduced another one: *The Voice of Holland*. He was convinced that the *American Idol/X Factor* formula was played out. Says de Mol, "The trick that worked for many years – a professional jury killing a totally untalented 16-year-old boy with braces who thinks he is Michael Jackson – started to show weak spots because people foresaw the tricks and the structure."

Instead, he had a team of producers spend more than a year developing new tricks, chief among them a now-famous audition process: Coaches sit in red chairs with their backs to auditioning singers, turning around at the press of a button when they're impressed. They also eliminated the William Hung element entirely, instead drawing from a solidly talented pool of contestants, including referrals from Universal Music Group talent scouts. The other twist never fails to make compelling TV: When more than one coach wants a contestant for their team, the power dynamic shifts, with rich and famous coaches forced to supplicate themselves before an unknown.



"She's cool," says Cee Lo of Aguilera. "But she spends a lot of time in her corner."

Senior writer BRIAN HIATT profiled the Black Keys in RS 1148.



"I never thought that I'd be someone that worked," says Levine.

The American *Voice* is almost identical to the Dutch version, albeit with coaches more internationally famous than the likes of Angela Groothuizen and Roel van Velzen. But it could have been a different show altogether: Reality auteur Mark Burnett had been working on his own idea for a competition, where celebrity coaches would also have fielded teams of singers, when Paul Telegdy, president of NBC's alternative and late-night programming, brought *The Voice of Holland* to his attention.

They decided to drop their own idea and instead try to import *The Voice* – and while CBS also had interest in the show, de Mol was more inclined to go with NBC, which has been mired in fourth place among broadcast networks. "NBC was not the first network you would think of," says de Mol. "But I felt NBC was the right place because they needed a hit so badly, so they would give it support." NBC got it – and gave Burnett just four months to find judges, assemble a production team and put it on the air.



ADAM LEVINE DOESN'T have a cold, or so he keeps insisting. "I'm not actually sick, I swear to you," he says, blowing his nose in the West Hollywood studio where he's spending a 12-hour day filming an endless series of mentoring sessions with members of his team.

Levine was ready for a change: Maroon 5 "felt slightly stagnant ... definitely not as big as it once was."

"My allergies are driving me crazy," says Levine. "Celebrities are just like us – they have boogers."

For the first part of the day, Levine – in a white V-neck and jeans – and guest coach Robin Thicke stand by a gleaming black piano (a crew member runs in to polish it between every take) in a huge studio, helping the contestants through stripped-down versions of battle-round songs. They have to pretend that the numerous cameras that swarm them aren't there, which can be tough: As one contestant – a tall blond girl from Kansas with a wispy voice – struggles to engage in "natural" banter with Levine and Thicke, a crew member barks, "Take a step to your left!" She jumps.

At lunchtime, Levine heads into a trailer devoid of personal effects and begins eating a mix of grains, kale and salmon from a plastic container. "I like to eat healthy

because I like to feel good," he says. "A big part of sustaining your own life is not to feel like shit."

Levine, 32, isn't feeling great at the moment, what with the allergies and the fact that he was out late drinking the night before (he left a voicemail message of him singing Erykah Badu's "Tyrone" on a friend's phone). But he has a job to do – which still unsettles him. "I never thought that I would be someone that worked," he says, kicking his feet up on a faux-wood counter. "I always thought that I had escaped having to work by being in a band. I should be living the rock & roll lifestyle that everyone thinks I live!"

When Burnett approached Levine about the show, he was feeling restless. "When I turned 30, I started thinking to myself, like, 'Oh... what the hell have I been doing my whole life?' And I was like, 'No, man, there's a million things I wanna do with my life. I'm gonna do 'em.' And *The Voice* was a huge part of realizing that in myself."

At the same time, Maroon 5 seemed to have plateaued. "We felt slightly stagnant," he says. "We felt like, we've had hits, we've had songs that have gone nowhere, a lot of ups and downs. We're on the road, maybe we're not playing to the biggest crowds we've played to in our lives. It's not gone down the shitter, but it's definitely not as big as it once was." Levine says his bandmates supported the new gig, seeing the show as a chance to get renewed attention – even though it

meant rescheduling some tour dates. It was a smart bet: During the season, Maroon 5 debuted "Moves Like Jagger," the Aguilera-featuring tune that has become one of their biggest songs ever.

Always a competitive dude – he used to spend hours battling his bandmates at *Halo* – Levine came in determined to win. "I thought to myself, 'If I'm going to do this, I'm going to do this 100 percent.' I won't fuck around. I want to be as present doing *The Voice* as I am onstage. So I decided that really early on. I had conversations with everyone else, and they were like, 'Holy shit, man, you really care about this.'"

Levine quickly showed himself to be as smooth a TV presence as he is a frontman – able to schmooze the best singers to join his team. "I finally got a chance to talk," he says. "Singers don't get to talk. I'm relatively articulate and I felt like maybe I deserved a shot at letting people know that." Frustrated by his slickness, Aguilera called Levine a used-car salesman on camera – which began their habit of on-screen bickering. The apparent conflict – which sometimes seemed more like flirting – fueled rumors of a feud and lent a certain charge to her appearance on "Moves Like Jagger."

"I don't have problems with Christina," Levine says. "Anyway, if I did, I wouldn't tell you! The problems that I face on a daily basis are all little stupid things that aren't gonna affect our relationship in the long run. Being pissed off that Christina's late, which, like...yeah, she's been late a bunch of times. She got better at it. So, I'm not mad about it anymore, you know? We're playful. I know as much as

scared. Now it's *The Voice* and everyone's flipping out."

As the crew takes Levine over for yet another set of segments, he gives an exaggerated moan. "I want to die," he says, starting to get punchy.

"Can I at least get a handy while we do this? Who's got the lube?" he adds, perhaps backing up Aguilera's locker-room argument. "I need a scotch and a BJ!"



CEE LO GREEN SCANS HIS hotel's room-service menu, and shakes his head. "It's all a little froufrou for me," he says. He's in a 54th-floor Manhattan hotel suite, where remote-controlled curtains have parted to reveal a Hudson River view. He's wearing an enormous white T-shirt and dark track pants; he's covered in a maze of tattoos, including the word THINK on his right wrist and the word TWICE on his left (it's a reference to a line from Gnarl Barkley's "Crazy" and also, as he notes, "general good advice").

Eventually, he decides on a Cobb salad, but thinks twice: "Is avocado good for you?" Cee Lo is trying to watch what he eats – and not because of Levine's habit of poking his impressive belly and saying, "We've got to close down the grocery store."

"I'm just a naturally big guy," Cee Lo says. "I don't know if I want to get as small as Adam. I don't think that'd work for me. I don't want to disappoint the ladies. They truly do love me just as I am." (Though lately, he adds, he's hardly had time for that. "We work so hard that I'll be lucky to get a massage with a happy ending!")

our power, this is our time. I feel wonderful and strange and bizarre and unique and all those kinds of things. And I do feel beautiful. It goes back to Sly Stone: Everybody is a star."



SOME STARS CAN'T HELP shining brighter than others, however – as Aguilera demonstrates while shooting her own mentoring sessions. "I just want to be here to support and encourage you guys," Aguilera tells one pair of singers, a preppy dude with a powerful operatic voice and a curly-haired woman who seems influenced by Celine Dion. They're in a rented Silver Lake mansion, standing beside a piano underneath a crystal chandelier. Aguilera casually demonstrates a high note for them – and the sound that comes out of her throat is so pure, piercing and huge that it practically knocks her team members out of the room. "I get loud," she says later, giggling.

As Burnett rushed to put *The Voice* together, he heard one thing over and over from his colleagues: "You'll never get Christina Aguilera for this show." But he saw her as essential to establishing the show's brand and credibility – "I said to myself, 'Christina Aguilera is the voice of her generation'" – and he pushed for a meeting. She signed on after Burnett assured her there would be no Simon Cowell-style humiliations on the show.

Aguilera had just come off what she calls "a rough year": In 2010, she got divorced, released an album (the synth-y *Bionic*) and movie (*Burlesque*, with Cher) that were both poorly received, and canceled a tour. "Going through a divorce, anybody would have a difficult time," she says, "but being a female under the microscope in the public eye, it was that much harder."

She started feeling she "needed to take a break from myself for a second. At that point, I really didn't know the show was even going to be as big as it was. It was more like, 'This is a really cool concept in a way that I can experience something outside of myself and give back and maybe be able to inspire myself as an artist again.'"

After a long career of her own, Aguilera particularly loved *The Voice*'s inclusion of older contestants who may have already gone through a record contract or two. "It's nice to give people second chances," she says. "It's a great opportunity to give people new life and jump-start not only them but your heart and your spirit for this business again."

Not coincidentally, she's been working on a new album of her own. "I only make records when I'm really passionate and have something to say, and I have a lot to say, with the time that was taken off since my last record – a couple of years. I have a lot of shit, a lot of crazy shit."

For a woman who once strutted in backless leather chaps (in the "Dirrrty" video,

Aguilera was chatting with Shelton at an after-show party when she suddenly told him, "I don't think you like me."

people don't want this to be true, there are no problems between us. I hope that's the case on her side too. I feel like it is. We have conversations after the show and we're just like, hanging, and it's all good. So it's fine."

Soon, Levine's lunch hour is over, and he has to change into a different V-neck for further mentoring segments – these are called "sit and chats," and they drag on and on. Between takes, he shows Thicke a picture of his Victoria's Secret-model girlfriend ("We've been together two years. For me, that's like, forever"), repeats Chris Rock routines and complains about overly busy drummers: "They all wish they were in Dave Matthews Band." After several contestants complain about nerves, he muses, "It was so different last year. No one knew what this was, so no one was

"But I want to be healthy. I lost a few really good friends, though it wasn't all about their weight. I lost my friend Heavy D recently, and I was friends with Patrice O'Neal. So it's just like, I'm looking at them and noticing the similarities. I want to be as healthy as possible. I've got a young son and I want to be around for him."

Cee Lo is also in near-constant pain from a slipped disk in his back, a condition that's only aggravated by his relentless traveling. *The Voice* is a chance to earn a living without touring – and he's looking into a Las Vegas residency as well.

On a less practical level, he sees his presence on the show, belly and all, as a triumph "for regular people. I feel like there are so many images and false idols. I feel like someone like myself is toppling those things over. We are the majority. This is



Backstage hoops with Cee Lo: "It's a crazy locker-room kind of situation," says Aguilera.

which Cee Lo shamefacedly counts as a favorite), Aguilera can be unexpectedly vulnerable. She likes that *The Voice* shows "a softer side" of her – and it's done the same off-camera. She was chatting with Shelton at an after-show party at his house last season when she suddenly said to him, "I don't think you like me." Shelton called over his wife, singer Miranda Lambert, who revealed that Shelton's birthday gift a couple of years back was an autographed Aguilera tour book. "She's my favorite female vocalist," says Shelton (who also admits to having had a "major crush" on her – he had even designated her as a marital "free pass," never expecting to meet her). "I told Christina that, and I'll never forget the look on her face. Of course, knowing Christina now, probably somebody that works for her signed that autograph."

While the guys hang out on set, Aguilera often heads to her trailer to spend time with her son, Max. "Christina, I don't know why they give her so much shit," says Cee Lo. "But she's cool. She's quiet. She wants to be a success at everything, including being a mother. I have not had any negative energy from her. It's mainly because she's not really around. She just spends a lot of time in her corner. We're guys, so we're out drinking beers and talking shit – seemingly we get along a lot better. But she hardly ever hangs out with us. She's kind of focused on going about her business. And I can respect that. And I know that she *is* a business, just by watching her. She has about 17 people around her at all times!"

As far as Aguilera is concerned, you can go ahead and call her a diva. "Of course. Hello! Do you know who you're talking to? I'm a female, I'm very assertive and also I'm working on a show called *The Voice* and I'm known for being sort of a powerhouse vocalist – and I'm sorry, but a great vocalist in my time – so you do get pigeonholed and titled 'diva.' And if that just means being an assertive woman and knowing what you want, I will gladly wear that title to the day I die."

But she does her best to ignore gossip about the show, and her life. "At this point, you could throw anything at me, and it's not going to stick," she says. "Everything outside of my home and my vision and my goals for myself is noise. I keep my focus on where I want to go in my career. The train ain't slowing down anytime soon. I want to be on that stage, 80 years old, singing some old blues song, with a cane, and croak that way, when it's my time."



LEVINE TAKES A DEEP breath, glances at his fellow coaches, and goes for it. "This is going to sound disgusting and barf, but I have to say, I have nothing but love for you guys. I'm serious!"

Aguilera touches his arm. "Aww, Adam!" She likes to remind him that he didn't actually win anything last season – it was Javier Colon who triumphed. "I agree with you," Levine says. "I didn't win shit. I don't get my *Voice* prize in the mail...I peaked too early and now I'm fucked!"

Cee Lo suddenly straightens up again in his chair and asks the other three, "How long do you guys think that you could go on with the show?" They gape at him.

"Why are you asking that?" Aguilera says. "This is not a good question right now, it's going to be on tape!"

"I was asking myself that the other day," Cee Lo continues, innocently, "because this is so great, it could last." (For the record, de Mol suggests that changing a judge or two after a couple of years could "bring in a new sparkle," and NBC entertainment chairman Bob Greenblatt says, "We love these coaches, but if for whatever reason one of them said, 'I really don't know that I can do it this year,' we would try to find somebody to replace them. And I think the show could certainly go on if that had to happen.")

Aguilera sighs. "I don't think this is the time or place to discuss that, Cee Lo!"

"I could do this show forever," Cee Lo says.


Levine can't take it anymore, and he reaches for my digital recorder. "Shut this fucking thing off," he says.

Instead, I ask Aguilera if she could successfully coach her fellow coaches. "Maybe not coach them, but do other things," she says. "Like, spank them all."

"Whoa!" says Cee Lo, clearly pondering visions of "Dirrrty."

"Not like that," Aguilera says, and all the guys groan in disappointment. "But they all deserve spankings."

Levine nods. "I don't doubt it," he says. "Spank me, motherfucker!"



O'Neal onstage
in 2009. "He
was funnier than
everybody,"
said Chris Rock.

BARRY BRECHTSEW/
WIREIMAGE

DEATH OF A STAND-UP

Chris Rock and Louis C.K. said Patrice O'Neal was the funniest comic in America – and America was starting to catch on. But just a month after his breakthrough gig, it all came to a tragic end By Jonah Weiner

PATRICE O'NEAL, THE FUNNIEST comedian America had never heard of, boarded a Los Angeles-bound plane at JFK last September, heading to the biggest gig of his life. Later that month, 6.4 million people would tune in to watch Comedy Central's *Roast of Charlie Sheen* – the largest audience to ever watch O'Neal work a room. Joining a motley panel that included William Shatner and Mike Tyson, O'Neal would be the last to whip jokes at the Warlock. The six-foot-five, 300-pound comedian was accustomed to closing out a batting order. Even Chris Rock, who called O'Neal “funnier than everybody,” once admitted he'd be nervous to follow the man. 🍷 He landed at LAX at 9 p.m. and headed to the Ritz-Carlton

in Marina del Rey to freshen up, nibble on a fruit plate and, oh yeah, figure out some jokes. He was due at the taping at 1:45 p.m. the next day, but still wasn't sure what he'd say; he'd only gotten the job a week before, and he'd been busy shooting a movie with Patton Oswalt and Johnny Knoxville. The network kept asking him to e-mail his bit, and he kept blowing them off. “I don't want some smarmy white writers looking at my unfinished shit,” he said. Around 11 p.m., Comedy Central sent a comedian named Kurt Metzger over to help hash together jokes. “He had general ideas in a notebook,” Metzger says. “I was just helping him polish it into something they could put on a teleprompter.” 🍷 O'Neal had grown up playing football, and he came at humor as if it were a contact sport. He loved messing with people, flaying them with such glee that it could take a while to realize that this was how he expressed affection. “He didn't take any shit from anybody, and he presented himself that way,” says comedian and podcast host Marc Maron, who first met O'Neal in 1997. “Most of the attention you were going to get from him wasn't going to be positive, but it would be framed in a way that was so cutting and funny that you kind of craved it.” 🍷 Louis C.K., who called O'Neal his favorite working

PATRICE O'NEAL

stand-up, said the two would get into sparring matches: "We would lock horns on stuff. I told him once I wasn't sexually attracted to black women, and he tested me for two hours, saying that meant I'm gay."

His combativeness was essential to his stand-up, where racial and gender tensions were his big themes. O'Neal, who grew up worshipping Richard Pryor and George Carlin, saw comedy as a platform for id-dredging honesty, the more offensive the better. He fantasized in his acts about owning white slaves. He contemplated chaining a white baby to his belt and going sailing, guaranteeing his rescue should he go missing. His observations on women were even more confrontational, full of over-the-top misogyny: "When you suck a dick, make a sound between retarded and choking," he instructed women in one bit, simultaneously celebrating and mocking male depravity. "That's sexy to us." His provocations were bolstered by a vast, searching intelligence. "He had a perspective, a distance, that most people don't have," says Sarah Silverman. "He seemed to be able to see the big picture when the rest of us saw dots."

At the Sheen roast, the participants railed on each other, and O'Neal's race, heft and health were easy targets – he was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes at age 23. "Holy Christ, you're fat – you look like you deep-fry your hands before you bite your fingernails," said comic Anthony Jeselnik. Amy Schumer dubbed the night "a farewell party for Patrice's foot."

When his turn came, O'Neal did something unexpected: He abandoned almost all of his prepared jokes and ripped, hilariously and viciously, into his fellow roasters. "I'm just disappointed and hurt at how much comfort white people have around you now," he told Tyson. Shatner made a joke about housing projects; O'Neal theorized, "I think he might be racist because his hair plugs look like black girls' pussy hair." He changed the air in the room: Whereas the other comics were doing material, he was maneuvering on the fly. "His dissection of us was so pure and real, and damn funny," roast master and *Family Guy* creator Seth MacFarlane said later. "He was so very in the moment," said fellow panelist Jeffrey Ross. "He roasted the roast."

After the program aired, O'Neal's buzz rocketed as new converts traded YouTube links to his performance and dug up older bits. The broadcast – the highest-rated roast in Comedy Central history – capped what was looking like O'Neal's year: *Elephant in the Room*, his brilliant hourlong Comedy Central special, had aired to acclaim in February; FX, which saw O'Neal as something like a black Louis C.K., signed him up for a sitcom and promised free creative rein; offers were pouring in. At 41,

Contributing editor JONAH WEINER
profiled Louis C.K. in RS 1146/1147.



Life After Death

O'Neal with longtime girlfriend Brown (1) in 2008. The 300-pounder played high school football (2) and treated comedy like a contact sport. On *Arrested Development* in 2003 (3).



O'Neal was poised to achieve the fame that had eluded him for two decades.

AROUND 2 A.M. ON OCTOBER 19th, a month to the day after the broadcast, O'Neal called his longtime girlfriend, Vondé Carlo Brown, saying he couldn't move his legs. "I think I'm having a stroke," he said in a voice fainter than any she'd ever heard him use. Paramedics rushed him to Jersey City Medical Center; he was soon transferred to Englewood Hospital for surgery to remove a blood clot in his head. He'd never leave the hospital again. He lost his speech, then control of his limbs. Brown installed herself bedside, as did O'Neal's 64-year-old mother, Georgia, who came in from his hometown of Boston. Doctors warned that even if O'Neal survived he'd likely be "locked in" – conscious but unable to speak or move. He responded to stimuli for a time by moving his eyes, then he lost that ability too. On November 29th, just eight days shy of his 42nd birthday, Patrice O'Neal died.

On a cold, sunny day in January, Georgia O'Neal is at her son's Jersey City condo, where he lived since 2006, packing up his things. The walls are painted a rich maroon that Patrice picked out himself, and art he bought during several trips to Brazil – landscapes, abstracts – hangs everywhere. There's a photograph of Carlin on

one wall, and another of Pryor in the bedroom. "I've got so much to do," Georgia says, trying not to choke up. She works in customer service at a Massachusetts health-insurance company, but "I've been out here for so long, I don't know whether I'm gonna have a job when I get back. I'm trying to resume a halfway normal life. It will never be completely normal again. I've lost my son."

Georgia raised Patrice and his sister by herself in the largely black working-class Boston neighborhood of Roxbury. His father was never in the picture, and Patrice said he had no interest in meeting him. Georgia named him Patrice Malcolm O'Neal, after Malcolm X and Patrice Lumumba, the Congolese independence fighter. Other kids made fun of his name, teasing that it sounded like a girl's, and he learned to give as good as he got. When he began performing, his mother asked if he would adopt a stage name. "Aw, no," he said. "I learned how to be a man with this name." He was a gregarious kid: popular, cracking everybody up. He had a hungry mind, too. He'd pore through books from the library and take apart toys to put them back together, "analyzing things and figuring out how they worked," Georgia says. "He did the same thing in his comedy."

At summer camp when Patrice was 10, a white boy called him "nigger"; when he grabbed the kid to avenge the insult, Patrice was kicked out of the camp. The in-

justice stung, but mostly, he said, he grew up accustomed to “covert racism,” which irritated him more. On *Mr. P*, a live CD out this month, O’Neal tells the crowd, “White people used to be able to walk around and go” – singsong voice – “I don’t like niggers! I’m gonna hang one of you motherfuckers!” The post-civil-rights era is infuriating, he says, “‘cause I gotta figure out, ‘Is this motherfucker being racist? I don’t know!’”

O’Neal was masterful on the subject of race – as perceptive, trenchant and wild as Chris Rock or Dave Chappelle. He came at the subject with bits that belied their conceptual sophistication and avoided easy moralizing: “I feel more comfortable when I see old white men doing some kinda shit,” he said in a 2008 bit, lampooning black self-hatred. “You ever see a black pilot on a plane? You be like, ‘Where the fuck – is this nigga driving to where the real pilot is?’” He scoffed at the notion of black doctors, too. “What you gonna operate on, my pinkie toe? Because that’s the only thing I’m gonna let you touch, nigger!”

At 16, O’Neal had sex with a 15-year-old white girl. She complained to police, although O’Neal always maintained the encounter had been consensual. Convicted of statutory rape, he was sentenced to 60 days at the MCI-Concord holding facility outside Boston. “It was my worst nightmare,” he said. “When I get there, I’m not trying to be hard, ‘cause I know I’m not hard.” He was a sensitive kid. The first time he’d seen N.W.A, he confessed, they scared him.

After high school, he enrolled at Northeastern University, majoring in theater. In 1992, watching an open-mic night at the comedy club Estelle’s, he heckled a performer, who challenged him to try it himself. O’Neal returned the following week and “kept on going from there.” Dane Cook, who worked Boston clubs around the same time, recalls seeing one of O’Neal’s earliest performances, during which he joked about going to summer camp in the countryside and, growing homesick, wanting a cassette of gunshots and sirens to lull him to sleep. “He had this gentle-giant appeal,” Cook says. “He already had an edge, but he was a little more vulnerable.”

That vulnerability, at least outwardly, didn’t last long. The comedian Jim Norton, who went on to become one of O’Neal’s closest friends, recalls that the two first met while sharing a college bill near New York in the mid-Nineties. Both bombed, but O’Neal laid into Norton afterward, jabbering about how shitty his act had been. “I thought he was a complete asshole,” Norton says. O’Neal sometimes began meetings with television executives by quizzing them about their network’s failures. Being confrontational “was his way of testing you, gauging your reaction,”

says JoAnn Grigioni, vice president of talent at Comedy Central.

His brashness could be self-sabotaging. After O’Neal played a bouncer in Spike Lee’s *25th Hour*, Lee, impressed, asked him to forgo pilot-season auditions, suggesting that he’d make it worth O’Neal’s while if he remained available for upcoming projects; O’Neal refused. He’d had roles on *Arrested Development* and *The Office*, but when *Office* producers asked him to fly to L.A. to shoot another episode, he blew it off. It was a six-line character, he later explained. “I just couldn’t do it.”

He came to auditions unprepared, goaded executives, became known as a bridge-burner. Louis C.K. remarked that O’Neal “could be slumped in a chair, and Steven Spielberg walks up to him, and he’d look at him like, ‘Do I have to take my hands out of my pockets and shake your hand?’” O’Neal’s manager, Jonathan Brandstein, once pitched him to a network big who rejected him flatly: “We don’t have time for Patrice’s bullshit.”

O’NEAL OFTEN JOKED ABOUT HIS DIABETES. IN A BIT ABOUT EATING WHITE-CHOCOLATE OREOS, HE SAID, “I DON’T NEED BOTH MY FEET. I’M NOT A BALLERINA!”

But that same candor killed during his countless appearances on SiriusXM’s *Opie & Anthony Show*, where O’Neal elevated shooting the shit to an art, riffing on everything from Illuminati conspiracy theories (he liked them) to why *Fight Club* is “the *Scarface* of white people.” “I’d be thinking, ‘Has he been working on this concept forever?’” says co-host Greg “Opie” Hughes. “But it was a subject we’d just brought up!”

Onstage, O’Neal said, his aim was to be “an unedited racist, unedited sexist, unedited piece of garbage.” An animal lover, he kept a 200-gallon fish tank full of African cichlids and adored his two dogs: Gladys, a poodle, and Dude, a Westie. At a “Canine Comedy” fundraiser in 2003, however, after the crowd had talked through several performers’ sets, he began describing the dog he’d eaten that morning for breakfast. The room got silent. “Let’s hear it for countries that eat dogs!” he hollered. An organizer ordered him to stop; he didn’t. They cut off his mic; he began bashing out songs on a piano. “I don’t give audiences power,” he declared later. “I don’t need them.”

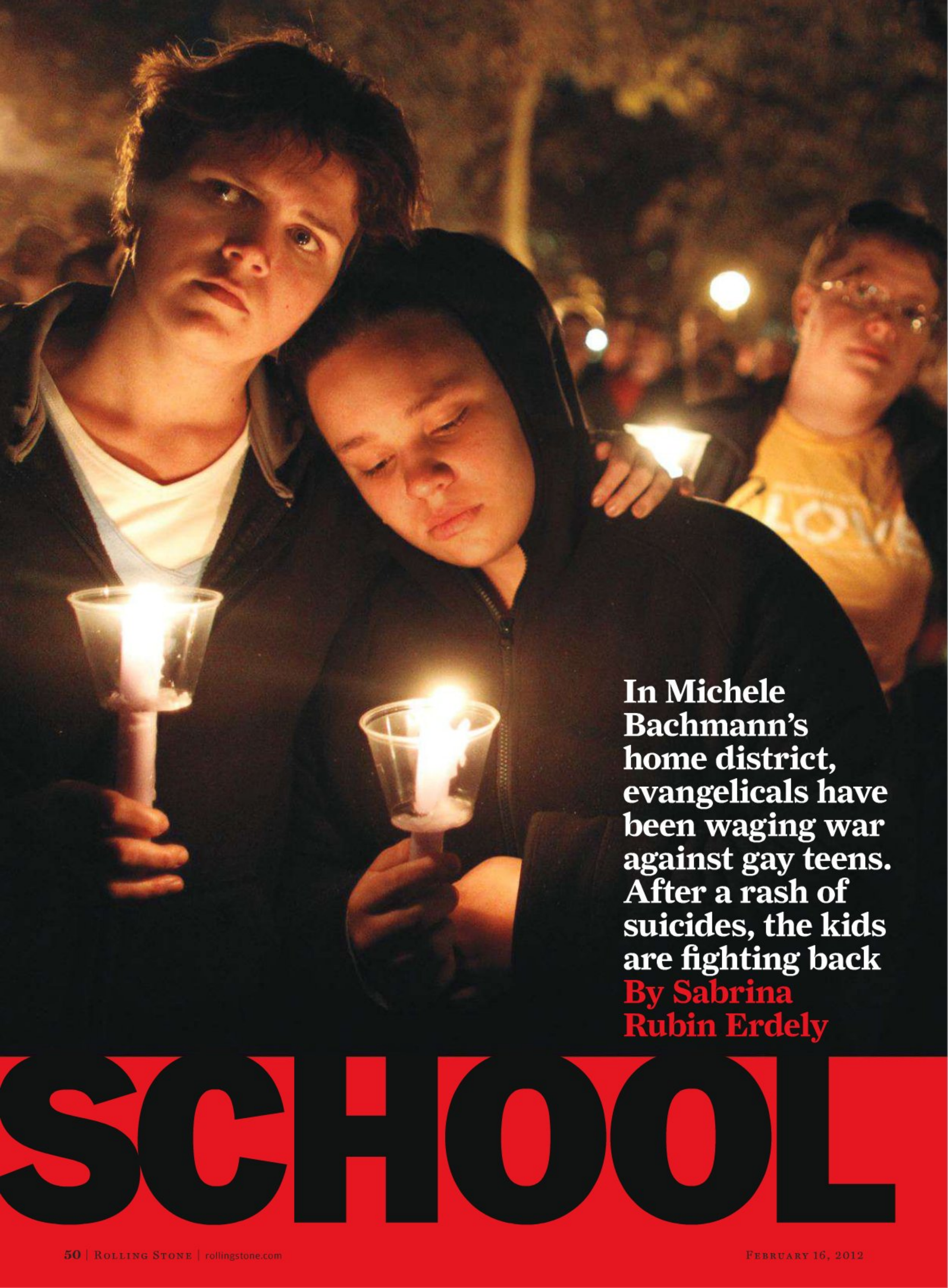
FOR YEARS, O’NEAL HAD TURNED his illness into grist for comedy. “I joke about everything,” he said, “because that just keeps you from killing yourself.” In *Elephant in the Room* there’s a bit about eating white-chocolate-covered Oreos: “I be like, ‘You know what, I don’t need both my feet. I’m not a ballerina!’” He goes on to talk about pissing in his girlfriend’s mouth during sex, after which she suggests they go to the hospital: “Your pee taste like birthday cake.”

It’s hard to say exactly where O’Neal’s problems with self-control veered into self-destructiveness. In an interview a few days before his stroke, he said he was miserable “all the time.” He loved Brazilian steakhouses, devouring skewer after skewer. In 2008, he kept a diary for the food blog Grub Street; his intake over five days included mac-’n’-cheese with fried chicken, buffalo wings, an omelet with corned-beef hash and two pancakes, fish and chips, kielbasa, cheese bread and several “dead animals on a stick.” “I like going, ‘Uhhh, I’m done’ when I eat,” he wrote.

O’Neal’s ravenous appetite went beyond food. Beginning in the early 2000s, he took a series of vacations to Rio de Janeiro with the express purpose of fucking prostitutes. “We’d take 100 milligrams of Viagra and go to the whorehouse,” Norton, who accompanied O’Neal on three trips, recalls. When O’Neal went in 2006, he brought his girlfriend, Brown, a musician and actress he’d met on the set of *25th Hour*. How comfortable was she with O’Neal’s sex tourism? “Oh, I was a participant,” she says with a sly smile. “We were swingers at a point.” There had been less of that recently: The pair had plans to marry, and O’Neal treated Brown’s daughter, now 13, like his own. His death came as a relative shock, says Brown. He’d been living better: trying veganism, eating sugar-free cookies, resisting soda and sweets.

In the end, it was too late. The service for O’Neal was held on December 5th at New York’s Park Avenue Christian Church. Rock, Cook, Colin Quinn and Wanda Sykes were all there; Russell Simmons and Martin Lawrence sent flowers. Several speakers were comedians. One of the biggest laughs came when Quinn took the microphone. “I bet Patrice is up in heaven right now,” he said, “trying to talk to God as an equal.”

Over the following weeks, the flurry of YouTube links that had followed the Sheen roast became a storm. *Elephant in the Room* and the roast were in heavy rotation on Comedy Central, and tributes from stand-up giants piled up online. In death, O’Neal had become a certified comedy superstar. “I think if he were still around he’d be surprised to know the outpouring of love he’s gotten,” Jim Norton says. “He didn’t realize how much people really liked him.”

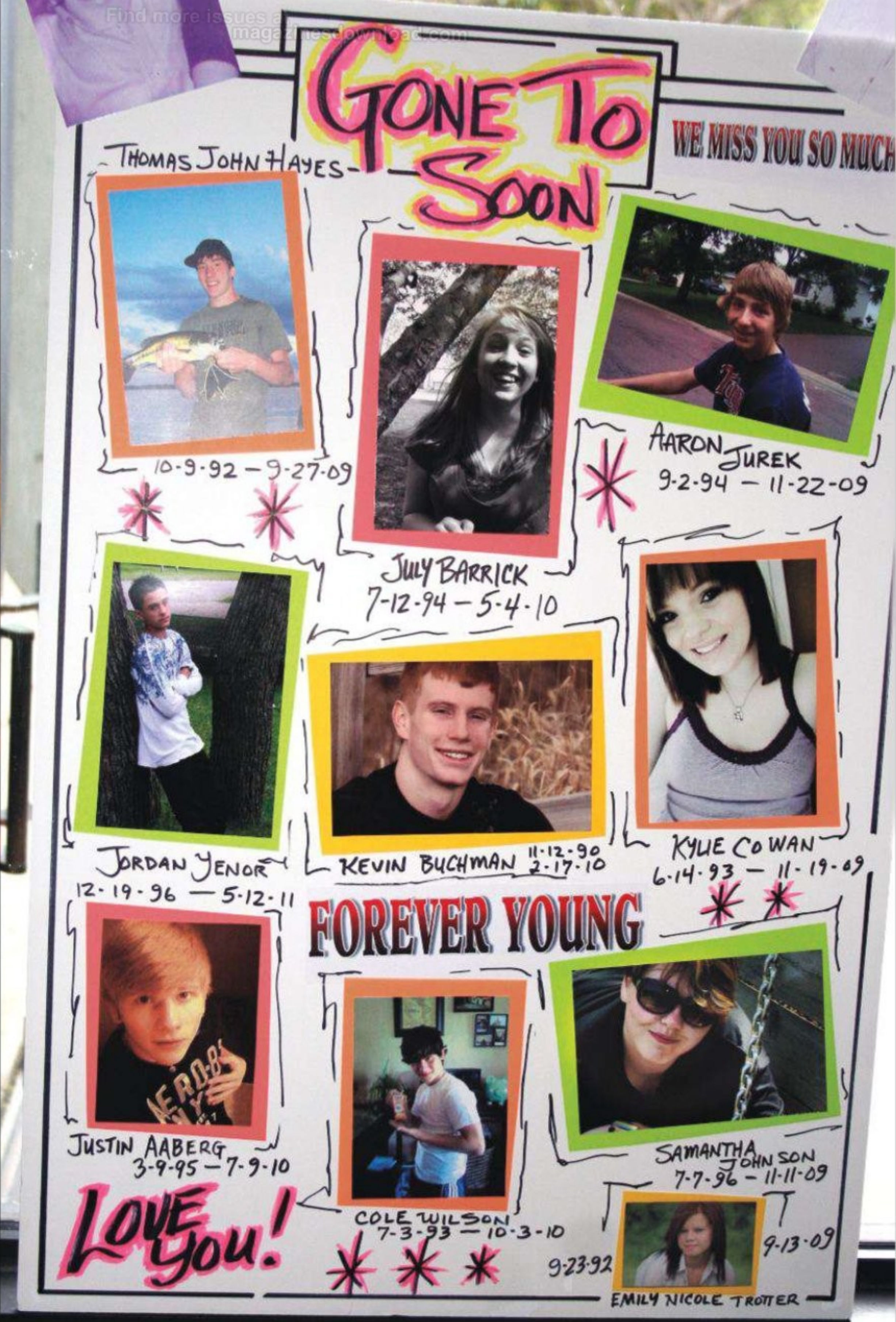


In Michele Bachmann's home district, evangelicals have been waging war against gay teens. After a rash of suicides, the kids are fighting back
By Sabrina Rubin Erdely

SCHOOL



Above: A candlelight vigil in Minneapolis for the victims of gay bullying. Right: An anti-suicide memorial poster.



OF HATE

VERY MORNING, BRITTANY GELDERT stepped off the bus and bolted through the double doors of Fred Moore Middle School, her nerves already on high alert, bracing for the inevitable.

"Dyke."

Pretending not to hear, Brittany would walk briskly to her locker, past the sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders who loitered in menacing packs.

"Whore."

Like many 13-year-olds, Brittany knew seventh grade was a living hell. But what she didn't know was that she was caught in the crossfire of a culture war being waged

by local evangelicals inspired by their high-profile congressional representative Michele Bachmann, who graduated from Anoka High School and, until recently, was a member of one of the most conservative churches in the area. When Christian activists who considered gays an abomination forced a measure through the school board forbidding the discussion of homosexuality in the district's public schools, kids like Brittany

were unknowingly thrust into the heart of a clash that was about to become intertwined with tragedy.

Brittany didn't look like most girls in blue-collar Anoka, Minnesota, a former logging town on the Rum River, a conventional place that takes pride in its annual Halloween parade – it bills itself the "Halloween Capital of the World." Brittany was a low-voiced, stocky girl who dressed in baggy jeans and her dad's Marine Corps sweatshirts. By age 13, she'd been taunted as a "cunt" and "cock muncher" long before such words had made much sense. When she told administrators about the abuse, they were strangely unresponsive, even though bullying was a subject often discussed in school-board meetings. The district maintained a comprehensive five-page anti-bullying policy, and held diversity trainings on racial and gender sensitivity. Yet when it came to Brittany's harassment, school officials usually told her to ignore it, always glossing over the sexually charged insults. Like the time Brittany had complained about being called a "fat dyke": The school's principal, looking pained, had suggested Brittany prepare herself for the next round of teasing with snappy comebacks – "I can lose the weight, but you're stuck with your ugly face" – never acknowledging she had been called a "dyke." As though that part was OK. As though the fact that Brittany was bisexual made her fair game.

So maybe she *was* a fat dyke, Brittany thought morosely; maybe she deserved the teasing. She would have been shocked to know the truth behind the adults' inaction: No one would come to her aid for fear

of violating the districtwide policy requiring school personnel to stay "neutral" on issues of homosexuality. All Brittany knew was that she was on her own, vulnerable and ashamed, and needed to find her best friend, Samantha, fast.

Like Brittany, eighth-grader Samantha Johnson was a husky tomboy too, outgoing with a big smile and a silly streak to match Brittany's own. Sam was also bullied for her look – short hair, dark clothing, lack of girly affect – but she merrily shrugged off the abuse. When Sam's volleyball teammates' taunting got rough – barring her from the girls' locker room, yelling, "You're a guy!" – she simply stopped going to practice. After school, Sam would encourage Brittany to join her in privately mocking their tormentors, and the girls would parade around Brittany's house speaking in Valley Girl squeals, wearing bras over their shirts, collapsing in laughter. They'd become as close as sisters in the year since Sam had moved from North Dakota following her parents' divorce, and Sam had quickly become Brittany's beacon. Sam was even helping to start a Gay Straight

"GAY STUDENTS DON'T FEEL SAFE," SAYS ONE EDUCATOR. "THEY'RE BULLIED, SHAMED, AND NO ONE STANDS UP FOR THEM BECAUSE TEACHERS ARE AFRAID OF BEING FIRED."

Alliance club, as a safe haven for misfits like them, although the club's progress was stalled by the school district that, among other things, was queasy about the club's flagrant use of the word "gay." Religious conservatives have called GSAs "sex clubs," and sure enough, the local religious right loudly objected to them. "This is an assault on moral standards," read one recent letter to the community paper. "Let's stop this dangerous nonsense before it's too late and more young boys and girls are encouraged to 'come out' and practice their 'gayness' right in their own school's homosexual club."

Brittany admired Sam's courage, and tried to mimic her insouciance and stoicism. So Brittany was bewildered when one day in November 2009, on the school bus home, a sixth-grade boy slid in next to her and asked quaveringly, "Did you hear Sam said she's going to kill herself?"

Brittany considered the question. No way. How many times had she seen Sam roll her eyes and announce, "Ugh, I'm gonna kill myself" over some insignificant thing? "Don't worry, you'll see Sam tomorrow," Brittany reassured her friend as they got off the bus. But as she trudged toward her house, she couldn't stop turning it over in her mind. A boy in the district had already committed suicide just days into the school year – TJ Hayes, a 16-year-old at Blaine High School – so she knew such things were possible. But *Sam Johnson*? Brittany tried to keep the thought at bay. Finally, she confided in her mother.

"This isn't something you kid about, Brittany," her mom scolded, snatching the kitchen cordless and taking it down the hall to call the Johnsons. A minute later she returned, her face a mask of shock and terror. "Honey, I'm so sorry. We're too late," she said tonelessly as Brittany's knees buckled; 13-year-old Sam had climbed into the bathtub after school and shot herself in the mouth with her own hunting rifle. No one at school had seen her suicide coming.

No one saw the rest of them coming, either.

SAM'S DEATH LIT THE FUSE of a suicide epidemic that would take the lives of nine local students in under two years, a rate so high that child psychologist Dan Reidenberg, executive director of the Minnesota-based Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, declared the Anoka-Hennepin school district the site of a "suicide cluster," adding that the crisis might hold an element of contagion; suicidal thoughts had become catchy, like a lethal virus. "Here you had a large number of suicides that are really closely connected, all within one school district, in a small amount of time," explains Reidenberg. "Kids started to feel that the normal response to stress was to take your life."

Contributing editor SABRINA RUBIN ERDELY wrote "The Catholic Church's Secret Sex Files" in RS 1139.



Tragedy in the Suburbs

Above: Thirteen-year-old Samantha Johnson's suicide after being bullied was the start of a wave of what one child psychologist says was a "suicide cluster," a lethal contagion when "kids feel that the normal response to stress is to take your life." Left: Johnson's best friend, Brittany Geldert, became suicidal after Sam's death.

There was another common thread: Four of the nine dead were either gay or perceived as such by other kids, and were reportedly bullied. The tragedies come at a national moment when bullying is on everyone's lips, and a devastating number of gay teens across the country are in the news for killing themselves. Suicide rates among gay and lesbian kids are frighteningly high, with attempt rates four times that of their straight counterparts; studies show that one-third of all gay youth have attempted suicide at some point (versus 13 percent of hetero kids), and that internalized homophobia contributes to suicide risk.

Against this supercharged backdrop, the Anoka-Hennepin school district finds itself in the spotlight not only for the sheer number of suicides but because it is accused of having contributed to the death toll by cultivating an extreme anti-gay climate. "LGBTQ students don't feel safe at school," says Anoka Middle School for the Arts teacher Jefferson Fietek, using the acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning. "They're made to feel ashamed of who they are. They're bullied. And there's no one to stand up for them, because teachers are afraid of being fired."

The Southern Poverty Law Center and the National Center for Lesbian Rights have filed a lawsuit on behalf of five students, alleging the school district's policies

on gays are not only discriminatory, but also foster an environment of unchecked anti-gay bullying. The Department of Justice has begun a civil rights investigation as well. The Anoka-Hennepin school district declined to comment on any specific incidences but denies any discrimination, maintaining that its broad anti-bullying policy is meant to protect all students. "We are not a homophobic district, and to be vilified for this is very frustrating," says superintendent Dennis Carlson, who blames right-wingers and gay activists for choosing the area as a battleground, describing the district as the victim in this fracas. "People are using kids as pawns in this political debate," he says. "I find that abhorrent."

Ironically, that's exactly the charge that students, teachers and grieving parents are hurling at the school district. "Samantha got caught up in a political battle that I didn't know about," says Sam Johnson's mother, Michele. "And you know whose fault it is? The people who make their living off of saying they're going to take care of our kids."

Located a half-hour north of Minneapolis, the 13 sprawling towns that make up the Anoka-Hennepin school district — Minnesota's largest, with 39,000 kids — seems an unlikely place for such a battle. It's a soothingly flat, 172-square-mile expanse sliced by the Mississippi River,

where woodlands abruptly give way to strip malls and then fall back to placid woodlands again, and the landscape is dotted with churches. The district, which spans two counties, is so geographically huge as to be a sort of cross section of America itself, with its small minority population clustered at its southern tip, white suburban sprawl in its center and sparsely populated farmland in the north. It also offers a snapshot of America in economic crisis: In an area where just 20 percent of adults have college educations, the recession hit hard, and foreclosures and unemployment have become the norm.

For years, the area has also bred a deep strain of religious conservatism. At churches like First Baptist Church of Anoka, parishioners believe that homosexuality is a form of mental illness caused by family dysfunction, childhood trauma and exposure to pornography — a perversion curable through intensive therapy. It's a point of view shared by their congresswoman Michele Bachmann, who has called homosexuality a form of "sexual dysfunction" that amounts to "personal enslavement." In 1993, Bachmann, a proponent of school prayer and creationism, co-founded the New Heights charter school in the town of Stillwater, only to flee the board amid an outcry that the school was promoting a religious curriculum. Bachmann also is affiliated with the ultraright Minnesota Family Council, headlining a fundraiser for them last spring alongside Newt Gingrich.

Though Bachmann doesn't live within Anoka-Hennepin's boundaries anymore, she has a dowdier doppelgänger there in the form of anti-gay crusader Barb Anderson. A bespectacled grandmother with lemony-blond hair she curls in severely toward her face, Anderson is a former district Spanish teacher and a longtime researcher for the MFC who's been fighting gay influence in local schools for two decades, ever since she discovered that her nephew's health class was teaching homosexuality as normal. "That really got me on a journey," she said in a radio interview. When the Anoka-Hennepin district's sex-ed curriculum came up for re-evaluation in 1994, Anderson and four like-minded parents managed to get on the review committee. They argued that any form of gay tolerance in school is actually an insidious means of promoting homosexuality — that openly discussing the matter would encourage kids to try it, turning straight kids gay.

"Open your eyes, people," Anderson recently wrote to the local newspaper. "What if a 15-year-old is seduced into homosexual behavior and then contracts AIDS?" Her agenda mimics that of Focus on the Family, the national evangelical Christian organization founded by James Dobson; Family Councils, though technically independent of Focus on the Family, work on the state level to accomplish Focus' core

SCHOOL OF HATE

goals, including promoting prayer in public spaces, "defending marriage" by lobbying for anti-gay legislation, and fighting gay tolerance in public schools under the guise of preserving parental authority—reasoning that government-mandated acceptance of gays undermines the traditional values taught in Christian homes.

At the close of the seven-month-long sex-ed review, Anderson and her colleagues wrote a memo to the Anoka-Hennepin school board, concluding, "The majority of parents do not wish to have there [sic] children taught that the gay lifestyle is a normal acceptable alternative." Surprisingly, the six-member board voted to adopt the measure by a four-to-two majority, even borrowing the memo's language to fashion the resulting districtwide policy, which pronounced that within the health curriculum, "homosexuality not be taught/addressed as a normal, valid lifestyle."

The policy became unofficially known as "No Homo Promo" and passed unanimously to parents and unpublished in the policy handbooks; most teachers were told about it by their principals. Teachers say it had a chilling effect and they became concerned about mentioning gays in any context. Discussion of homosexuality gradually disappeared from classes. "If you can't talk about it in any context, which is how teachers interpret district policies, kids internalize that to mean that being gay must be so shameful and wrong," says Anoka High School teacher Mary Jo Merrick-Lockett. "And that has created a climate of fear and repression and harassment."

Suicide is a complex phenomenon; there's never any one pat reason to explain why anyone kills themselves. Michele Johnson acknowledges that her daughter, Sam, likely had many issues that combined to push her over the edge, but feels strongly that bullying was one of those factors. "I'm sure that Samantha's decision to take her life had a lot to do with what was going on in school," Johnson says tearfully. "I'm sure things weren't perfect in other areas, but nothing was as bad as what was going on in that school."

THE SUMMER BEFORE JUSTIN Aaberg started at Anoka High School, his mother asked, "So, are you sure you're gay?"

Justin, a slim, shy 14-year-old who carefully swept his blond bangs to the side like his namesake, Bieber, studied his mom's face. "I'm pretty sure I'm gay," he answered softly, then abruptly changed his mind. "Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait!" he shouted—out of character for the quiet boy—"I'm positive. I am gay," Justin proclaimed.

"OK." Tammy Aaberg nodded. "So. Just because you can't get him pregnant doesn't mean you don't use protection." She proceeded to lecture her son about safe sex while Justin turned bright red and



The Battle Lines

The district's policy effectively banning discussion of homosexuality now draws pro-gay protesters to school-board meetings (above). Barb Anderson (near left), who co-authored "No Homo Promo," blames the activists for the district's tragedies.

beamed. Embarrassing as it was to get a sex talk from his mom, her easy affirmation of Justin's orientation seemed like a promising sign as he stood on the brink of high school. Justin was more than ready to turn the corner on the horrors of middle school—especially on his just-finished eighth-grade year, when Justin had come out as gay to a few friends, yet word had instantly spread, making him a pariah. In the hall one day, a popular jock had grabbed Justin by the balls and squeezed, sneering, "You like that, don't you?" That assault had so humiliated and frightened Justin that he'd burst out crying, but he never reported any of his harassment. The last thing he wanted to do was draw more attention to his sexuality. Plus, he didn't want his parents worrying. Justin's folks were already overwhelmed with stresses of their own: Swamped with debt, they'd declared bankruptcy and lost their home to foreclosure. So Justin had kept his problems to himself; he felt hopeful things would get better in high school, where kids were bound to be more mature.

"There'll always be bullies," he reasoned to a friend. "But we'll be older, so maybe they'll be better about it."

But Justin's start of ninth grade in 2009 began as a disappointment. In the halls of Anoka High School, he was bullied, called a "faggot" and shoved into lockers. Then, a couple of months into the school year,

he was stunned to hear about Sam Johnson's suicide. Though Justin hadn't known her personally, he'd known of her, and of the way she'd been taunted for being butch. Justin tried to keep smiling. In his room at home, Justin made a brightly colored paper banner and taped it to his wall: "Love the life you live, live the life you love."

BRITTANY COULDN'T STOP thinking about Sam, a reel that looped endlessly in her head. Sam dancing to one of their favorite metal bands, Drowning Pool. Sam dead in the tub with the back of her head blown off. Sam's ashes in an urn, her coffin empty at her wake.

She couldn't sleep. Her grades fell. Her daily harassment at school continued, but now without her best friend to help her cope. At home, Brittany played the good daughter, cleaning the house and performing her brother's chores unasked, all in a valiant attempt to maintain some family peace after the bank took their house, and both parents lost their jobs in quick succession. Then Brittany started cutting herself.

Just 11 days after Sam's death, on November 22nd, 2009, came yet another suicide: a Blaine High School student, 15-year-old Aaron Jurek—the district's third suicide in just three months. After Christmas break, an Andover High School senior, Nick Lockwood, became the dis-

trict's fourth casualty: a boy who had never publicly identified as gay, but had nonetheless been teased as such. Suicide number five followed, that of recent Blaine High School grad Kevin Buchman, who had no apparent LGBT connection. Before the end of the school year there would be a sixth suicide, 15-year-old July Barrick of Champlin Park High School, who was also bullied for being perceived as gay, and who'd complained to her mother that classmates had started an "I Hate July Barrick" Facebook page. As mental-health counselors were hurriedly dispatched to each affected school, the district was blanketed by a sense of mourning and frightened shock.

"It has taken a collective toll," says Northdale Middle School psychologist Colleen Cashen. "Everyone has just been reeling – students, teachers. There's been just a profound sadness."

In the wake of Sam's suicide, Brittany couldn't seem to stop crying. She'd disappear for hours with her cellphone turned off, taking long walks by Elk Creek or hiding in a nearby cemetery. "Promise me you won't take your life," her father begged. "Promise you'll come to me before anything." Brittany couldn't promise. In March 2010, she was hospitalized for a week.

IN APRIL, JUSTIN CAME HOME from school and found his mother at the top of the stairs, tending to the saltwater fish tank. "Mom," he said tentatively, "a kid told me at school today I'm gonna go to hell because I'm gay."

"That's not true. God loves everybody," his mom replied. "That kid needs to go home and read his Bible."

Justin shrugged and smiled, then retreated to his room. It had been a hard day: the annual "Day of Truth" had been held at school, an evangelical event then-sponsored by the anti-gay ministry Exodus International, whose mission is to usher gays back to wholeness and "victory in Christ" by converting them to heterosexuality. Day of Truth has been a font of controversy that has bounced in and out of the courts; its legality was affirmed last March, when a federal appeals court ruled that two Naperville, Illinois, high school students' Day of Truth T-shirts reading **BE HAPPY, NOT GAY** were protected by their First Amendment rights. (However, the event, now sponsored by Focus on the Family, has been renamed "Day of Dialogue.") Local churches had been touting the program, and students had obediently shown up at Anoka High School wearing **DAY OF TRUTH** T-shirts, preaching in the halls about the sin of homosexuality. Justin wanted to brush them off, but was troubled by their proselytizing. Secretly, he had begun to worry that maybe he was an abomination, like the Bible said.

Justin was trying not to care what anyone else thought and be true to himself. He surrounded himself with a bevy of

girlfriends who cherished him for his sweet, sunny disposition. He played cello in the orchestra, practicing for hours up in his room, where he'd covered one wall with mementos of good times: taped-up movie-ticket stubs, gum wrappers, Christmas cards. Justin had even briefly dated a boy, a 17-year-old he'd met online who attended a nearby high school. The relationship didn't end well: The boyfriend had cheated on him, and compounding Justin's hurt, his coming out had earned Justin hateful Facebook messages from other teens – some from those he didn't even know – telling him he was a fag who didn't deserve to live. At least his freshman year of high school was nearly done. Only three more years to go. He wondered how he would ever make it.

THOUGH SOME MEMBERS OF the Anoka-Hennepin school board had been appalled by "No Homo Promo" since its passage 14 years earlier, it wasn't until 2009 that the board brought the policy up for review, after a student named Alex Merritt filed a complaint with the state Department of Human Rights claiming he'd been gay-bashed by two of his teachers during high school; according to the complaint, the teachers had announced in front of students that Merritt, who is straight, "swings both ways," speculated that he wore women's clothing, and compared him to a Wisconsin man who had sex with a dead deer. The teachers denied the charges, but the school district paid \$25,000 to settle the complaint. Soon representatives from the gay-rights group Outfront Minnesota began making inquiries at board meetings. "No Homo Promo" was starting to look like a risky policy.

"The lawyers said, 'You'd have a hard time defending it,'" remembers Scott Wenzel, a board member who for years had pushed colleagues to abolish the policy. "It was clear that it might risk a lawsuit." But while board members agreed that such an overtly anti-gay policy needed to be scrapped, they also agreed that *some* guideline was needed to not only help teachers navigate a topic as inflammatory

as homosexuality but to appease the area's evangelical activists. So the legal department wrote a broad new course of action with language intended to give a respectful nod to the topic – but also an equal measure of respect to the anti-gay contingent. The new policy was circulated to staff without a word of introduction. (Parents were not alerted at all, unless they happened to be diligent online readers of board-meeting minutes.) And while "No Homo Promo" had at least been clear, the new Sexual Orientation Curriculum Policy mostly just puzzled the teachers who'd be responsible for enforcing it. It read:

Anoka-Hennepin staff, in the course of their professional duties, shall remain neutral on matters regarding sexual orientation including but not limited to student-led discussions.

It quickly became known as the "neutrality" policy. No one could figure out what it meant. "What is 'neutral'?" asks instructor Merrick-Lockett. "Teachers are constantly asking, 'Do you think I could get in trouble for this? Could I get fired for that?' So a lot of teachers sidestep it. They don't want to deal with district backlash."

English teachers worried they'd get in trouble for teaching books by gay authors, or books with gay characters. Social-studies teachers wondered what to do if a student wrote a term paper on gay rights, or how to address current events like "don't ask, don't tell." Health teachers were faced with the impossible task of teaching about AIDS awareness and safe sex without mentioning homosexuality. Many teachers decided once again to keep gay issues from the curriculum altogether, rather than chance saying something that could be interpreted as anything other than neutral.

"There has been widespread confusion," says Anoka-Hennepin teachers' union president Julie Blaha. "You ask five people how to interpret the policy and you get five different answers." Silenced by fear, gay teachers became more vigilant than ever to avoid mention of their personal lives, and in closeting themselves, they inadvertently ensured that many students had no real-life gay role models. "I was told by teachers, 'You have to be careful, it's really not safe for you to come out,'" says the psychologist Cashen, who is a lesbian. "I felt like I couldn't have a picture of my family on my desk." When teacher Jefferson Fietek was outed in the community paper, which referred to him as an "open homosexual," he didn't feel he could address the situation with his students even as they passed the newspaper around, tittering. When one finally asked, "Are you gay?" he panicked. "I was terrified to answer that question," Fietek says. "I thought, 'If I violate the policy, what's going to happen to me?'"

The silence of adults was deafening. At Blaine High School, says alum Justin Anderson, "I would hear people calling people 'fags' all the time without it

ANDERSON, THE AUTHOR OF "NO HOMO PROMO," DEFENDED HER STANCE, SAYING IF GAY KIDS WEREN'T OUT OF THE CLOSET IN THE FIRST PLACE, THEN THEY WOULDN'T BE BULLIED.



being addressed. Teachers just didn't respond." In Andover High School, when 10th-grader Sam Pinilla was pushed to the ground by three kids calling him a "faggot," he saw a teacher nearby who did nothing to stop the assault. At Anoka High School, a 10th-grade girl became so upset at being mocked as a "lesbo" and a "sinner" – in earshot of teachers – that she complained to an associate principal, who counseled her to "lay low"; the girl would later attempt suicide. At Anoka Middle School for the Arts, after Kyle Rooker was urinated upon from above in a boys' bathroom stall, an associate principal told him, "It was probably water." Jackson Middle School seventh-grader Dylan Frei was passed notes saying, "Get out of this town, fag"; when a teacher intercepted one such note, she simply threw it away.

"You feel horrible about yourself," remembers Dylan. "Like, why do these kids hate me so much? And why won't anybody help me?" The following year, after Dylan was hit in the head with a binder and called "fag," the associate principal told Dylan that since there was no proof of the incident she could take no action. By contrast, Dylan and others saw how the same teachers who ignored anti-gay insults were quick to reprimand kids who uttered racial slurs. It further reinforced the message resonating throughout the district: Gay kids simply didn't deserve protection.

The Lost Boy

"What about my parental rights to have my gay son go to school and learn without being bullied?" Tammy Aaberg tearfully demanded when she confronted the school board after her son Justin's death.

JUSTIN?" TAMMY AABERG RAPPED on her son's locked bedroom door again. It was past noon, and not a peep from inside, unusual for Justin.

"Justin?" She could hear her own voice rising as she pounded harder, suddenly overtaken by a wild terror she couldn't name. "*Justin!*" she yelled. Tammy grabbed a screwdriver and loosened the doorknob. She pushed open the door.

He was wearing his Anoka High School sweatpants and an old soccer shirt. His feet were dangling off the ground. Justin was hanging from the frame of his futon, which he'd taken out from under his mattress and stood upright in the corner of his room. Screaming, Tammy ran to hold him and recoiled at his cold skin. His limp body was grotesquely bloated – her baby – eyes closed, head lolling to the right, a dried smear of saliva trailing from the corner of his mouth. His cheeks were strafed with scratch marks, as though in his final moments he'd tried to claw his noose loose. He'd cinched the woven belt so

tight that the mortician would have a hard time masking the imprint it left in the flesh above Justin's collar.

Still screaming, Tammy ran to call 911. She didn't notice the cellphone on the floor below Justin's feet, containing his last words, a text in the wee hours:

:(he had typed to a girlfriend.
What's wrong
Nothing
I can come over
No I'm fine
Are you sure you'll be ok
No it's ok I'll be fine, I promise

SEEKING RELIEF FROM BULLYING, Brittany transferred to Jackson Middle School. Her very first day of eighth grade, eight boys crowded around her on the bus home. "Hey, Brittany, I heard your friend Sam shot herself," one began.

"Did you see her blow her brains out?"

"Did you pull the trigger for her?"

"What did it look like?"

"Was there brain all over the wall?"

"You should do it too. You should go blow your head off."

Sobbing, Brittany ran from the bus stop and into her mother's arms. Her mom called Jackson's guidance office to report the incident, but as before, nothing ever seemed to come of their complaints. Not after the Gelderts' Halloween lawn decorations were destroyed, and the boys on

the bus asked, "How was the mess last night?" Not after Brittany told the associate principal about the mob of kids who pushed her down the hall and nearly into a trash can. Her name became Dyke, Queer, Faggot, Guy, Freak, Transvestite, Bitch, Cunt, Slut, Whore, Skank, Prostitute, Hooker. Brittany felt worn to a nub, exhausted from scanning for threat, stripped of emotional armor. In her journal, she wrote, "Brittany is dead."

As Brittany vainly cried out for help, the school board was busy trying to figure out how to continue tactfully ignoring the existence of LGBT kids like her. Justin Aaberg's suicide, Anoka-Hennepin's seventh, had sent the district into damage-control mode. "Everything changed after Justin," remembers teacher Fietek. "The rage at his funeral, students were storming up to me saying, 'Why the hell did the school let this happen? They let it happen to Sam and they let it happen to Justin!'" Individual teachers quietly began taking small risks, overstepping the bounds of neutrality to offer solace to gay students in crisis. "My job is just a job; these children are losing their lives," says Fietek. "The story I hear repeatedly is 'Nobody else is like me, nobody else is going through what I'm going through.' That's the lie they've been fed, but they're buying into it based on the fear we have about open and honest conversations about sexual orientation."

LGBT students were stunned to be told for the first time about the existence of the neutrality policy that had been responsible for their teachers' behavior. But no one was more outraged to hear of it than Tammy Aaberg. Six weeks after her son's death, Aaberg became the first to publicly confront the Anoka-Hennepin school board about the link between the policy, anti-gay bullying and suicide. She demanded the policy be revoked. "What about my parental rights to have my gay son go to school and learn without being bullied?" Aaberg asked, weeping, as the board stared back impassively from behind a raised dais.

Anti-gay backlash was instant. Minnesota Family Council president Tom Prichard blogged that Justin's suicide could only be blamed upon one thing: his gayness. "Youth who embrace homosexuality are at greater risk [of suicide], because they've embraced an unhealthy sexual identity and lifestyle," Prichard wrote. Anoka-Hennepin conservatives formally organized into the Parents Action League, declaring opposition to the "radical homosexual" agenda in schools. Its stated goals, advertised on its website, included promoting Day of Truth, providing resources for students "seeking to leave the homosexual lifestyle," supporting the neutrality policy and targeting "pro-gay activist teachers who fail to abide by district policies."

Asked on a radio program whether the anti-gay agenda of her ilk bore any responsibility for the bullying and suicides,

Barb Anderson, co-author of the original "No Homo Promo," held fast to her principles, blaming *pro-gay* groups for the tragedies. She explained that such "child corruption" agencies allow "quote-unquote gay kids" to wrongly feel legitimized. "And then these kids are locked into a lifestyle with their choices limited, and many times this can be disastrous to them as they get into the behavior which leads to disease and death," Anderson said. She added that if LGBT kids weren't encouraged to come out of the closet in the first place, they wouldn't be in a position to be bullied.

Yet while everyone in the district was buzzing about the neutrality policy, the board simply refused to discuss it, not even when students began appearing before them to detail their experiences with LGBT harassment. "The board stated quite clearly that they were standing behind that policy and were not willing to take another look," recalls board member Wenzel. Further insulating itself from reality, the district launched an investigation into the suicides and unsurprisingly, absolved itself of any responsibility. "Based on all the information we've been able to gather," read a statement from the superintendent's office, "none of the suicides were connected to incidents of bullying or harassment."

Just to be on the safe side, however, the district held PowerPoint presentations in a handful of schools to train teachers how to defend gay students from harassment while also remaining neutral on homosexuality. One slide instructed teachers that if they hear gay slurs – say, the word "fag" – the best response is a tepid "That language is unacceptable in this school." ("If a more authoritative response is needed," the slide added, the teacher could continue with the stilted, almost apologetic explanation, "In this school we are required to welcome all people and to make them feel safe.") But teachers were, of course, reminded to never show "personal support for GLBT people" in the classroom.

Teachers left the training sessions more confused than ever about how to interpret the rules. And the board, it turned out, was equally confused. When a local advocacy group, Gay Equity Team, met with the

"PEOPLE WERE DYING," REMEMBERS ONE TEEN WHO FELT SUICIDAL. "EVERY TIME YOU SAID GOODBYE TO A FRIEND YOU FELT LIKE, 'IS THIS THE LAST TIME I'M GOING TO SEE YOU?'"

school board, the vice-chair thought the policy applied only to health classes, while the chair asserted it applied to all curricula; and when the district legal counsel commented that some discussions about homosexuality were allowed, yet another board member expressed surprise, saying he thought any discussion on the topic was forbidden. "How can the district *ever* train on a policy they do not understand themselves?" GET officials asked in a follow-up letter. "Is there any doubt that teachers and staff are confused? The board is confused!"

With the adults thus distracted by endless policy discussions, the entire district became a place of dread for students. Every time a loudspeaker crackled in class, kids braced themselves for the feared preamble, "We've had a tragic loss." Students spoke in hushed tones; some wept openly in the halls. "It had that feeling of a horror movie – everyone was talking about death," says one 16-year-old student who broke down at Anoka High School one day and was carted off to a psychiatric hospital for suicidal ideation. Over the course of the 2010-2011 school year, 700 students were evaluated for serious mental-health issues, including hospitalizations for depression and suicide attempts. Kids flooded school counselors' offices, which reported an explosion of children engaging in dangerous behaviors like cutting or asphyxiating each other in the "choking game."

Amid the pandemonium, the district's eighth suicide landed like a bomb: Cole Wilson, an Anoka High School senior with no apparent LGBT connection. The news was frightening, but also horrifyingly familiar. "People were dying one after another," remembers former district student Katie MacDonald, 16, who struggled with suicidal thoughts. "Every time you said goodbye to a friend, you felt like, 'Is this the last time I'm going to see you?'"

AS A LATE-AFTERNOON STORM beats against the windows, 15-year-old Brittany Geldert sits in her living room. Her layered auburn hair falls into her face. Her ears are lined with piercings; her nail polish is black. "They said I had anger, depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety, an eating disorder," she recites, speaking of the month she spent at a psychiatric hospital last year, at the end of eighth grade. "Mentally being degraded like that, I translated that to 'I don't deserve to be happy,'" she says, barely holding back tears, as both parents look on with wet eyes. "Like I deserved the punishment – I've been earning the punishment I've been getting."

She's fighting hard to rebuild her decimated sense of self. It's a far darker self than before, a guarded, distant teenager who bears little resemblance to the open-hearted young girl she was not long ago. But Brittany is also finding [Cont. on 68]

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Sir Paul takes a sentimental journey through the American songbook

Paul McCartney

★★★

Kisses on the Bottom

Hear Music/Concord

BY WILL HERMES



What's most surprising about Paul McCartney's new LP is not that it's full of

pre-rock pop standards, but that it took him so long to get around to this kind of project. He was the son of a jazz bandleader who turned the future Beatle on to songs like 1933's "It's Only a Paper Moon," among the tunes covered here. McCartney's writing always had old-school flavor: "When I'm Sixty-Four" and "Martha My Dear" evoked vaudeville; "Yesterday" echoed Nat "King" Cole's style. Like *Rock 'n' Roll*, John Lennon's 1975 album of primal rock gems, *Kisses on the Bottom* is the sound of a musician joyfully tapping his roots; and like his former songwriting partner, McCartney is better transforming influences than mirroring them. But it's fun, and touching, to hear him crooning his way through the great American songbook.

McCartney clearly loves the sentimentality these tunes thrive on. "More I Cannot Wish You," from the 1950 musical *Guys and Dolls*, is wrapped in a lush orchestral arrangement by Sinatra vet Johnny Mandel, and McCartney sinks into it with the avuncular warmth that flickered through "Let It Be." On Fats Waller's "My Very Good Friend the Milkman," McCartney invokes a lost world where lovers courted via postal service, singing in a sugared

half-whisper. As the title suggests – a cheeky pun from “I’m Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter,” another Waller cover – McCartney also revels in the lyrical wit. “We three/We’re not a crowd/We’re not even company,” he sings on “We Three (My Echo, My Shadow, and Me),” a hit for the proto-doo-wop vocal group the Ink Spots. Context also adds humor: See the 1926 standard “Bye Bye Blackbird,” which always vied with McCartney’s “Blackbird” for the species theme song.

Remarkably, aside from some acoustic guitar, Macca doesn’t touch an instrument. The ensemble is led by Diana Krall, a jazz-pop pianist who now has a track record of wooing British rockers – like Elvis Costello, her husband. With some A-list jazzbos (including drummer Karriem Riggins), the group complements McCartney’s playfulness while trying to steer clear of corn. Krall’s cozy swing animates “It’s Only a Paper Moon,” and even “The Inch Worm” is rescued from the kindergarten curriculum. Cameos imprint the two McCartney originals, which hold their own. “My Valentine” recalls Cole’s take on “My Funny Valentine” and features supple acoustic guitar by Eric Clapton. The slow dance “Only Our Hearts” is brightened by a Stevie Wonder harmonica solo.

There’s an irony here: The Beatles played a big role in permanently confining this style of pop to the margins. And if McCartney doesn’t bring much beyond his beloved timbre to these melodies, there’s a lovely honesty to the set, which reads in part as a love letter to Nancy Shevell, the new Mrs. McCartney. One imagines, had things played out differently, her hook-loving husband might have wound up doing just this: happily playing standards, with miles of charm, for whomever turned up at the pub.

Key Tracks: “It’s Only a Paper Moon,” “My Valentine”



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Lana Del Rey's Tedious Torch Songs

The self-proclaimed “gangster Nancy Sinatra” puts on a snoozy seductress act

Lana Del Rey ★★ *Born to Die* Interscope



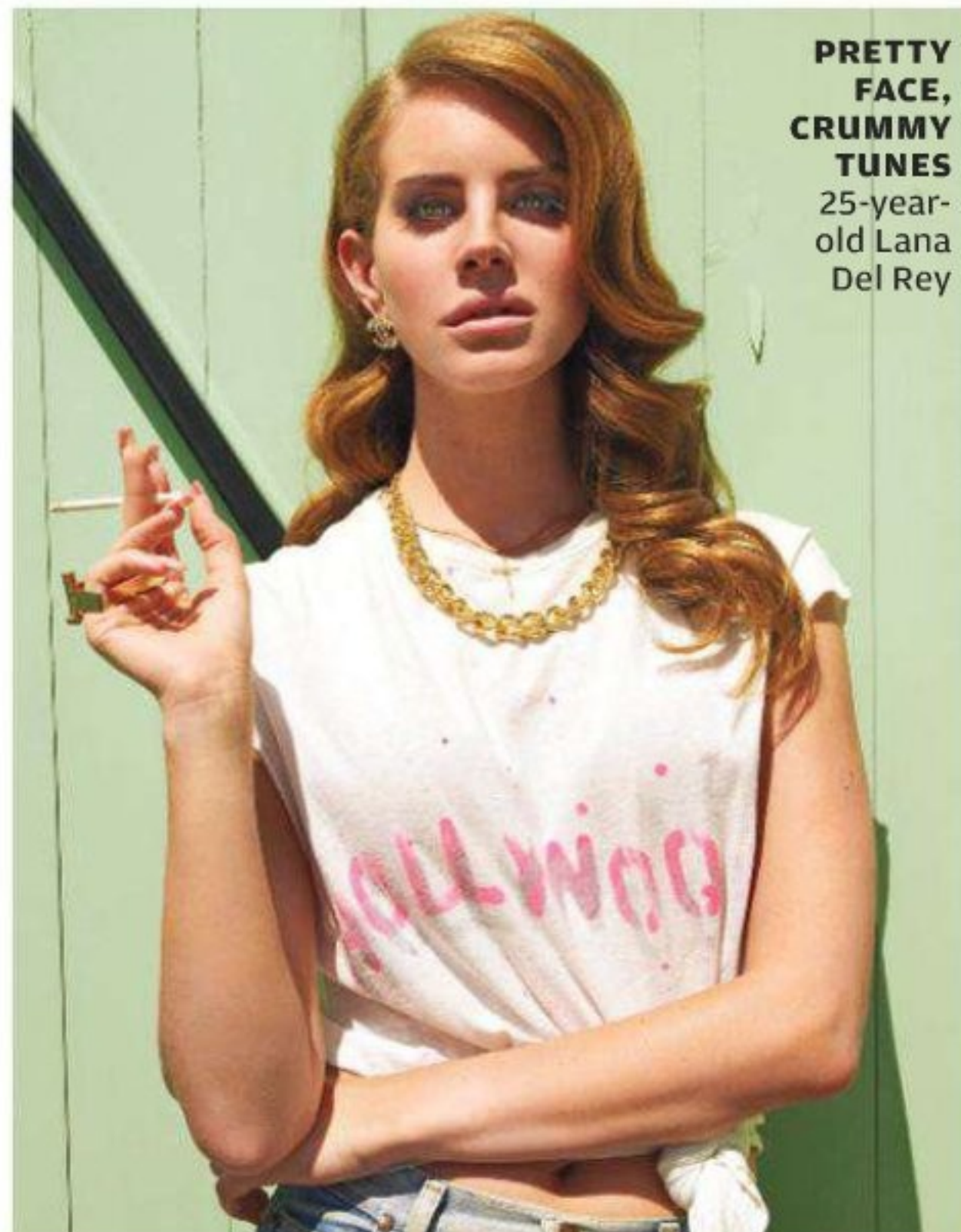
Give Lana Del Rey credit: At least she didn’t break down and cry on *Saturday Night Live*. She’s a starlet to music bloggers, who’ve been buzzing over her for the past year. But for the rest of us, she’s just another aspiring singer who wasn’t ready to make an album yet. Given her chic image, it’s a surprise how dull, dreary and pop-starved *Born to Die* is. It goes for folky trip-hop ballads with a tragic vibe, kinda like Beth Orton used to do. Except she could sing.

Her strength is the lyrics, which have the pop-trash perversion that the music lacks. The big theme: femininity as a scam, as lost girls preen for the gaze of imaginary sugar daddies. (Loads of *Lolita* references, though her literary template seems to be Poison’s “Fallen Angel.”) She has clever lines; in “Diet Mtn Dew,” she rhymes “Take another drag, turn me to ashes” with “Says he’s gonna teach me just what fast is.”

But her voice is pinched and prim, and her song doctors need to go the fuck back to med school. As any fan of Madonna, Britney or Steely Dan could tell you, lyrics about the perils of seduction work better when attached to seductive tunes. In case you miss the concept, “Without You” spells it out: It’s all about “the dark side of the American dream.” But American dreams are tempting, which is why they’re dangerous. Unfortunately, this one is neither.

Key Tracks:
“Video Games,”
“Diet Mtn Dew”

ROB SHEFFIELD



PRETTY FACE, CRUMMY TUNES
25-year-old Lana Del Rey

Wilco ★★★★★^{1/2}

iTunes Session *dBpm*

The Whole Love reheated, with sides



This live in-studio set remakes highlights from 2011’s excellent *The Whole Love*, a homespun survey of Wilco’s avant-garage skill set. Changes are subtle – guitar noise is rearranged on “Dawned on Me,” strings are dialed back on “Black Moon” – and sometimes barely discernible. More illuminating are the revisions of two older songs. Ten years and two long wars later, *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*’s “War on War” is more grizzled, with guitar convulsions trumping synth convulsions, and *A.M.*’s “Passenger Side” sounds like a post-rehab honky-tonk cautionary tale. A cover of Nick Lowe’s “Cruel to Be Kind,” with the songwriter himself handling lead vocals, also sticks close to the original. No wheels reinvented here, but they all roll pretty good.

WILL HERMES

Key Tracks: “Passenger Side,” “Black Moon”

Howlin' Rain

★★★★★

The Russian Wilds *American*

San Fran kids romp through a psych-rock time warp



The third album by this Northern California band is a raucous tangle of vintage bloodlines: the long-ride improvising and earthy-blues stomp of the Bay Area’s Fillmore-dance-party age. *The Russian Wilds* is also singer-guitarist/leader Ethan Miller’s determined surge forward through that past. The evocations in “Self Made Man” and “Strange Thunder” of early Santana, Humble Pie’s heavy soul and the cosmic-campfire harmonizing of Crosby, Stills and Nash are propelled with bracing studio clarity and hot-live-gig immediacy. The inspirations and pot-dream idealism may be retro; the zeal and momentum are not.

DAVID FRICKE

Key Tracks: “Self Made Man,” “Strange Thunder”

TOP SINGLES

Screaming Females ★★★½ "It All Means Nothing"

"I'll break the curse and show you what I'm worth!" declares Marissa Paternoster on this crushing jam from her band's upcoming *Ugly* LP - morphing her voice to a cartoon-demon-meets-Jersey-riot-grrrrl roar before launching a guitar firestorm. **WILL HERMES**

M.I.A. ★★★½ "Bad Girls"

This repolished highlight from M.I.A.'s *Vicki Leekx* mixtape still rides a slinky, Bollywood-style Danja beat, and the key line flips the emotional script: "I had a handle on it/My life, but I broke it." As anthems to recklessly empowered car sex go, surprisingly melancholy. **W.H.**

Lee Ranaldo ★★★ "Off the Wall"

It's hard not to read the Sonic Youth guitarist's new solo joint as a reckoning with SY founders Thurston Moore and Kim Gordon's marital split. "These days are so uncertain," Ranaldo sings. But with Wilco's Nels Cline helping him spool out riffs this serenely pretty, Ranaldo's future sounds assured. **JON DOLAN**

Amadou and Mariam ★★★½ "Dougou Badia"

Motherland, meet Brooklyn. Santigold and the Yeah Yeah Yeahs' Nick Zinner get down with Mali's Afro-pop ambassadors, and the ladies own the mics while the dudes plow fields with their electric guitars. If the stormy jam at the end went on for 10 more minutes, there'd be no complaints here. **W.H.**



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Springsteen

Springsteen's State of the Union Address

Bruce Springsteen ★★★★★ "We Take Care of Our Own"

Anguish and challenge run thick and fast in the first single from Bruce Springsteen's election-year missive, *Wrecking Ball* (due March 6th). "I been stumbling on good hearts turned to stone," he laments, assessing a nation exhausted by economic straits and locked in an uncivil war of values. Later, there is a reference to a still-dark stain on our honor: the black and poor abandoned to sweaty, feral hell in the Superdome during Hurricane Katrina.

The broken promises actually come with contagious déjà vu: a streamlined pop of synthlike countermelody, like "Dancing in the Dark" hung over with disappointment. Stubborn faith takes over in the final choruses. "Wherever this flag's flown/We take care of our own," he sings amid street-church voices. It is the sound of a guy who believes democracy isn't about percentages, 99, one or otherwise. It's all for one - or it will be all for nothing. **DAVID FRICKE**

Jack White's Twisted Heart

Jack White ★★★½ "Love Interruption"

The solo Jack White doesn't seem entirely sure what to do with himself, and sometimes - as on this loopy little soul sketch - that's what makes him eternally interesting. "I want love to grab my fingers gently, slam them in a doorway, put my face into the ground," the recent divorcee sings, hammering on his acoustic as organ spritz and puppy-eyed Casio bassoon evoke "Son of a Preacher Man." Nashville singer (and onetime *Sing-Off* contestant) Ruby Amanfu's harried backing warble fits a song that adds an awkwardly personal wrinkle to the White Stripes' errant primitivism. **J.D.**

Bonnie Raitt Slides Back

Bonnie Raitt ★★★ "Right Down the Line"

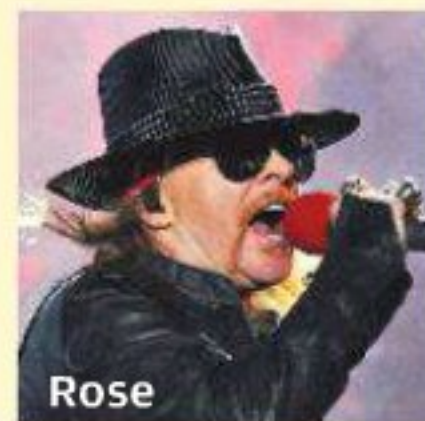
The song is Scottish (a cover of Gerry Rafferty's 1977 hit); the groove is Jamaican (a gentle reggae skank); the percussion is Latin (timbales and conga); and the guitar-playing is classic rock by way of Chicago blues. The singer - and, of course, the guitarist - is Bonnie Raitt, who has been turning rootsy sounds into smart, moving and unflashy pop rock for decades. Like the rest of Raitt's catalog, this tune from her forthcoming *Slipstream* LP is understated, almost to a fault. But Raitt's vocal hits just the right note of rueful worldly wisdom - and on her guitar solo, she shreds. **JODY ROSEN**

BOOTLEG

Guns N' Roses

Conseco Fieldhouse, Indianapolis, December 8th, 2011

In 2001, Guns N' Roses, the incarnation featuring Axl Rose and Buckethead on lead guitar, kicked off their *Chinese Democracy* tour. Strangely enough, it's still in progress, even though it's gone dark for years at a time and the *Chinese Democracy* LP landed with a thud in 2008. That's not to say that GNR put on a lousy show. This Indianapolis gig, which went on for nearly three hours, features a killer set list of all their hits. Rose's voice sounds so incredible, if a fan were to hear this performance of "November Rain" without any context, he might think it was



Rose

from the *Use Your Illusion* tour. In the past, GNR skipped their material from those 1991 albums, but at this show they dug out the epic "Civil War" and "Estranged." They also played instrumental versions of six classic tunes, including "Another Brick in the Wall Part 2" and "Whole Lotta Rosie," with guest Zakk Wylde on guitar. Overall, it's a pretty astounding show. It's just a shame that so many fans, burned by Rose's antics, are missing it. **ANDY GREENE**

Sharon Van Etten

★★★★★ Tramp Jagjaguwar

Singer-songwriter turns complicated love into slow-mo stunners

ARTIST TO WATCH

When Sharon Van Etten sings, “You’re the reason why I’ll move to the city or why I’ll need to leave,” you want to gas up the car and help her pack. Her last album, *Epic*, was a downer-folk gem; here, she and her double-tracked voice sound bigger, thanks partly to help from dudes in Beirut and the National. *Tramp* plays like a female version of Beck’s *Sea Change*, setting spacey guitar hum, tidal rhythms and pass-the-Xanax melodies against lyrics about silent love and bad timing. “Serpents” rotates on a two-chord vamp and then pumps up the anger, and “Leonard” waltzes around the room, unsure whether to give over to desire or walk away whole. Your soon-to-be-ex-girlfriend will have this on blast.

JOE GROSS

Key Tracks: “Serpents,” “Leonard”



KEY FACTS

Hometown Brooklyn

Backstory After working as a music publicist, Van Etten released her breakout, *Epic*, in 2010. The LP was inspired by a particularly shitty relationship. “He was crazy – very controlling,” she says. “I want

to say thanks for all the songs.”

Good Company Van Etten has recorded with Bon Iver, and counts TV on the Radio’s Kyp Malone as a mentor. She cut *Tramp* at a studio owned by Aaron Dessner of the National.

Of Montreal

★★★

Paralytic Stalks Polyvinyl

Indie sex prince goes from getting down to feeling down



What do you do when the orgy’s over? Tidy up, look at the pictures and – maybe – obsess over the consequences. After two LPs of glammy freak funk celebrating polymorphous urges both musical and sexual, Kevin Barnes is coming down, and it’s an epic bummer. On *Stalks*, lovers fight, get blood in their hair and vomit. Fun! The music is dense and jittery, jumping from brittle robo-beats to sunshiny psychedelic soul to spaced-out majesty. But it’s submerged beneath the noise of a dream unraveling, schizoid instead of sexy. It’s like getting it on with a paranoid android: The next twitch could be the moment pleasure turns to pain. JOE LEVY

Key Tracks: “Wintered Debts,” “We Will Commit Wolf Murder”

DUSTIN CONDREN

MadeYouAMix_Cause_Im

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Hospitality

★★★★★

Hospitality *Merge*

Catchy cuteness meets ace young-urbanite vignettes



Synth doodles and squeaky-cutesy vocals abound on this Brooklyn trio's aggressively adorable debut. But Hospitality have more to offer than mere sweetness: Check how the wistful ballad "Eighth Avenue" left-turns into a spastic guitar outburst, like Tom Verlaine crashing a Belle and Sebastian session. Amber Papini's lyrics keep the merry-sounding tunes grounded in reality – deft sketches of young New Yorkers falling for new loves, droning away at dead-end jobs and dreaming of far-away homes. The melodies are stickier than hot tar, but it's those vivid little scenes that lodge in your head the longest.

SIMON VOZICK-LEVINSON

Key Tracks: "Eighth Avenue," "Friends of Friends"

The Move

★★★★★

Live at the Fillmore 1969

Right Recordings

Onstage freakouts from forgotten Brit hitmakers



This is exciting rock archaeology: two CDs of the best British band most Yanks never heard in the Sixties, caught at a heavy-psychedelia peak on its only U.S. tour. The Move were almost too cool for America, a U.K.-hit-single machine of mod-squad assault, acid-pop eccentricity and, in singer Carl Wayne, white-soul force. These October '69 shows combine guitarist-composer Roy Wood's ingenious takes on madness – "I Can Hear the Grass Grow," "Cherry Blossom Clinic (Revisited)" – with explosive Nazz, Byrds and Tom Paxton covers that will make you wish you'd been there and glad that tape was running.

DAVID FRICKE

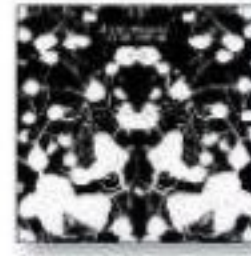
Key Tracks: "Cherry Blossom Clinic (Revisited)," "Open My Eyes"

Underworld

★★★★

A Collection *underworld.com*

Influential U.K. techno guys get an oddly curated overview



A single CD of short edits is an odd thing for a prog-techno act who specialize in spacious songs that often run for more than 10 minutes. The live "Cowgirl" is nothing and the dubstep moves are clumsy. No matter: Motormouth vocalist Karl Hyde and music man Rick Smith (plus, in the Nineties, Darren Emerson) headline festivals because they craft hooks, however abstruse at times. An R&B star should sample the surging synths of "Two Months Off" and "Dark and Long." The creeping menace of "Rez" hasn't abated a bit. And "Born Slippy (Nuxx)" is one of the strangest generation-defining anthems ever recorded. MICHAELANGELO MATOS

Key Tracks: "Two Months Off," "Born Slippy (Nuxx)"

Tennis ★★★

Young & Old *Fat Possum*

Husband, wife make girl-group pop with a bitter center



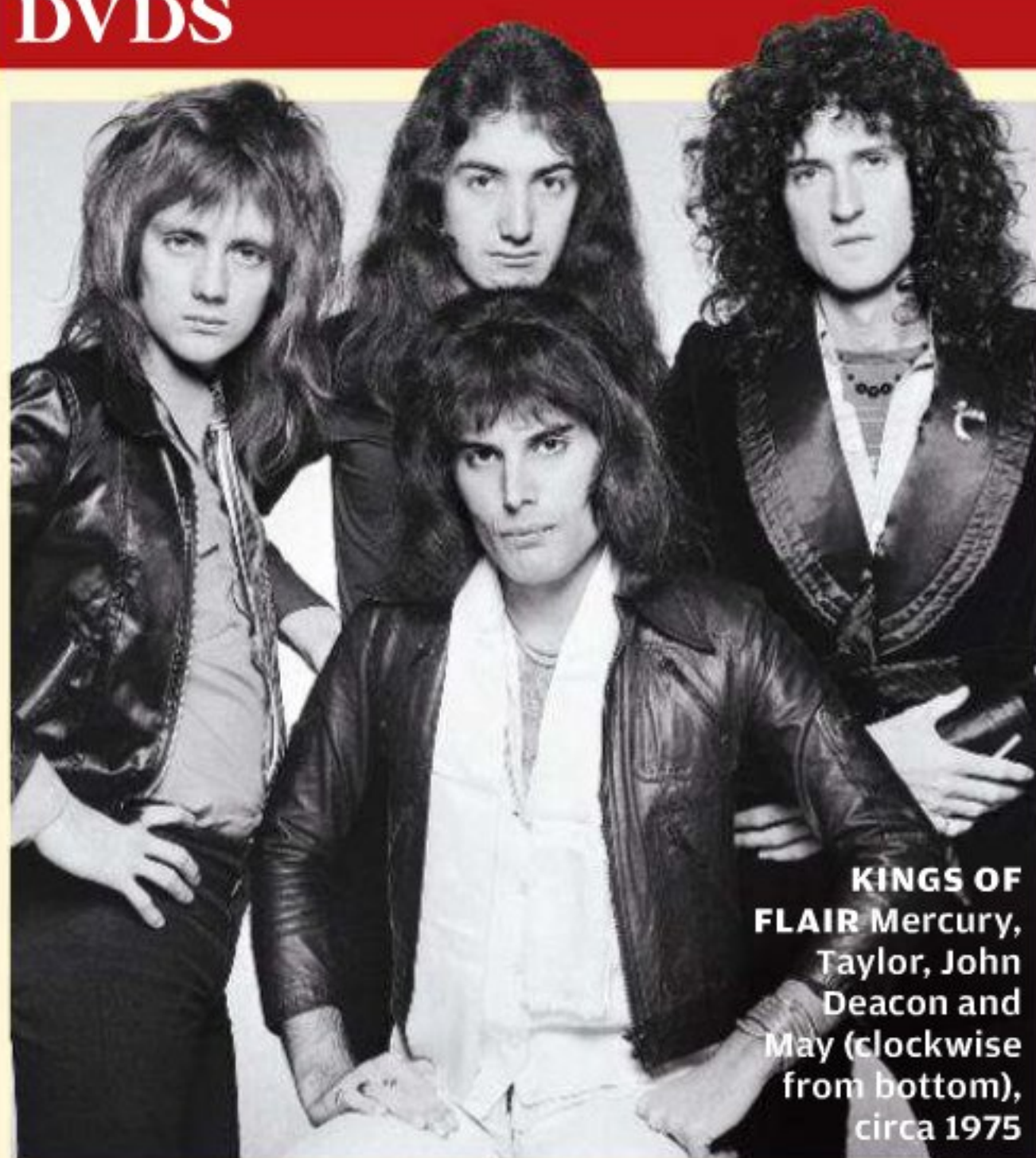
On their 2011 debut, husband-and-wife team Alaina Moore and Patrick Riley played miniskirt-twirling girl-group tunes about a boat trip they took down the East Coast. It's a grabby conceit they don't try to top here; they just bang out a solid set of similarly Spector-ian stuff, where surfy organ pipes and confectionary *ooh-oohs* get toughened by garage-rock production from the Black Keys' Patrick Carney. Moore is a Ronnie Spector minus any Sixties optimism or teen-dream illusions; on "Origins," the sense of betrayal almost feels biblical: "Will you make my children bear the consequences (everywhere)?" she asks her evil man. So much for sailing the sea of love. JON DOLAN

Key Tracks: "My Better Self," "Origins"

TooShyToAskYouOut.mp3



DVDs



KINGS OF FLAIR Mercury, Taylor, John Deacon and May (clockwise from bottom), circa 1975



Queen: Days of Our Lives

★★★★★ *Eagle Vision*

Queen took studio indulgence and stadium razzle-dazzle to stratospheric heights in the 1970s and 1980s – then saw their career come to an all-too-sudden end with Freddie Mercury's death in 1991. This BBC documentary captures that story of excess and tragedy like no other film. Earnest

guitarist Brian May and jovial drummer Roger Taylor are more candid than ever, and their tales are abetted by massive amounts of archival footage. We hear unadorned vocals from "Bohemian Rhapsody," see May in tears while relating how a 1977 Madison Square Garden gig finally won his father's approval, and watch the making of the video for "These Are the Days of Our Lives," cut six months before Mercury died of AIDS. He's sickly beneath thick makeup, yet still manages to sparkle.

BARRY WALTERS



God Bless Ozzy Osbourne

★★★★★ *Eagle Vision*

Co-produced by son Jack and wife Sharon, this doc shows an entirely different Ozzy than the bumbling crank from MTV's notorious reality show *The Osbournes*. Now clean and sober, Ozzy serves as straightforward commentator on his twisted life journey. There's the usual glut of surreal drug

anecdotes: Tommy Lee recalls Ozzy licking up urine and then painting his hotel room's walls with his feces. (Osbourne's memory isn't as sharp; he can't even remember trying to kill Sharon.) Like much of Ozzy's career, *God Bless* exploits the rocker's appetite for self-destruction, but it's nice to see the hard times haven't robbed him of all his brain cells.

B.W.



Let England Shake: 12 Short Films by Seamus Murphy

★★★★½ *Vagrant/Island*

Let England Shake has won the Mercury Prize and topped many year-end polls, but PJ Harvey's 2011 album about war, imperialism and the U.K.'s declining power doesn't exactly come up and give you a kiss. Seamus Murphy's film adaptation feels

warmer, offsetting the album's keening intensity with the quiet visual poetry of everyday life. The clips alternate home-performance footage of the singer and her band with striking images of old folks ballroom dancing and playing bingo, and other simple scenes that capture a peaceful, nearly timeless England – a serene antidote to Harvey's more sinister *Blighty*.

B.W.

The Marvelettes

★★★★½

Forever More: The Complete Motown Albums, Volume 2 *Motown/Hip-O Select*
Where the "Please Mr. Postman" ladies got weirder



Classic Motown's glamorous chart punches aren't the whole story with the Marvelettes. After early-Sixties wonders like "Beechwood 4-5789," the girl group, fronted by Gladys Horton and later Wanda Rogers, released songs more often smart, frank and out-there than hit-bound. This 109-track comp peaks with "The Hunter Gets Captured by the Game," a 1966 smash where writer-producer Smokey Robinson helps Rogers embark on a jazzy love safari. But throughout these four discs, the Marvelettes, whether rocking up "The Stranger" or going pop-orchestral on "Marionette," show how giant soul hooks and adventurousness may coexist.

JAMES HUNTER

Key Tracks: "The Stranger," "Marionette"

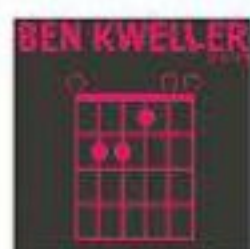
Ben Kweller

★★★★

Go Fly a Kite

The Noise Company

A power-pop whiz kid's grown-up heartbreak



On a series of early-2000s albums, Ben Kweller established himself as a versatile, lyrically clever power-pop whiz kid. But now he's 30, and mere talented craftsmanship will no longer do. So on his first album since 2009's alt-country detour, *Changing Horses*, he hones his best Cars, Harry Nilsson and Wilco moves into a personally revealing breakup record. "I slept with the mistress/I read from the Bible/It gave me revival," he sings on "Time Will Save the Day," setting Dylanesque lyrics to Weezer-ian tuneage. It's an ode to seasoned wisdom from a guy who's done being a prodigy.

JON DOLAN

Key Tracks: "Mean to Me," "Justify Me"

Die Antwoord

★★

Ten\$ion *ZEF*

Rap trio go from strikingly freaky to kind of annoying



On their 2010 debut, these South African weirdos occasionally struck a sly balance between Ninja's de-ranked rhymes, Yo-Landi Vi\$\$er's evil-sexpots coos and DJ Hi-Tek's slippery rave-rap beats. The novelty runs dry on Die Antwoord's second album, a marathon of overwrought beats and clunky horn-dog-rebel boasts. Ninja's idea of an anti-hip-hop rant involves quoting Vanilla Ice ("I do not want to stop, collaborate or listen," he whines on "Fatty Boom Boom"), and Yo-Landi brags, "Fuck you, Jimmy, I'm-a never give it back," of the million-dollar advance Die Antwoord reportedly got from their ex-boss, Interscope's Jimmy Iovine, who's on to sounder investments these days.

MONICA HERRERA

Key Tracks: "Fatty Boom Boom," "I Fink U Freaky"

Heartless Bastards

★★★★½

Arrow *Partisan*

Blues-rocking Black Keys homeys bulk up



"Simple feeling!" shouts Erika Wennerstrom, slurring the phrase until she's slinging gibberish. Um, maybe they aren't so simple? Her band's crushing fourth LP sets the quartet alongside Ohio kin the Black Keys as front-line blues-rock modernists, with her writhing vocals at the center; she works the vowels on "Marathon" with the focus of a woman who knots cherry stems with her tongue. Meanwhile, guitars scald: "Parted Ways" recalls Television's jam punk, "Got to Have Rock and Roll" is muddy-booted glam, "Down in the Canyon" is seven minutes of countrified doom metal. It's lifer rock from a new generation.

WILL HERMES

Key Tracks: "Simple Feeling," "Marathon"

Lindström

★★★★

Six Cups of Rebel
Smalltown Supersound
Norwegian disco doctor
enlarges practice



Hans-Peter Lindström's ecstatic synth disco occupies a stylin' cyborg middle ground between Daft Punk and Air; he's remixed LCD Soundsystem and transformed Bethany Cosentino into a bedroom-mirror dance diva on a reworking of Best Coast's "Boyfriend." The Norwegian DJ's third solo LP conjures the Eighties Midwestern art funk of Prince and Was (Not Was) in a miasmatic mix of club grooves. On "Magik" and "Quiet Place to Live," barely intelligible lyrics are like neon signage: more color than meaning, but seductive enough to lure you in and keep you there.

WILL HERMES

Key Tracks: "Magik," "De Javu"

The Fray

★★★

Scars & Stories *Epic*
Nation's biggest Coldplay
fans keep groping the sky



"I wanna kiss your scars tonight," Isaac Slade sings on "Heartbeat," a hope-rock anthem inspired by a visit to Rwanda. If it were a Lonely Island parody of an earnest rock band it'd be kind of funny. Unfortunately, the Fray are terrifyingly serious. Six years since their hit "How to Save a Life," they're still pumping American-Coldplay ballads full of sky-groping choruses and symphonic rushes. Producer Brendan O'Brien seems to have pushed them to turn down the Chris Martin piano rock a little. But a song about a boxer losing his last bout while his woman calls out his name ("The Fighter") is a patient beyond song-doctoring.

JON DOLAN

Key Tracks: "Heartbeat," "Rainy Zurich"

Escort

★★★★½

Escort *Escort*
New York disco orchestra
gives the mirror ball a spin



Got lamé? If not, this 17-member New York collective are offering the aural equivalent: a wickedly catchy, note-perfect return to the heyday of disco, with every high-hat sizzle and string shiver glittering like spangled hot pants. The revivalism extends to the lyrics, awash in Studio 54-era decadence – "A knife, a fork, a bottle and a cork/That's the way we spell New York" – delivered by Adeline Michèle with barely a wink. As with many retro-fetishists, Escort's shtick can be too on-the-nose – you wish they took more liberties, spiked their 1977 with a bit more 2012. But quibbles disappear as the beat kicks in and the mirror ball starts to whirl.

JODY ROSEN

Key Tracks: "All Through the Night," "Starlight"

BOOKS



Satan Is Real

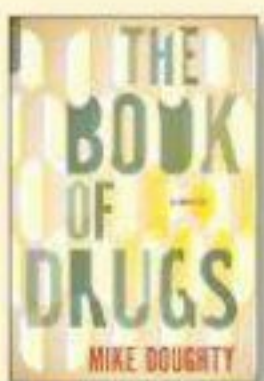
★★★★

Charlie Louvin with
Benjamin Whitmer

HarperCollins

In 1963, Ira Louvin tried to strangle his third wife with a telephone cord; she responded by shooting him six times with a .22-caliber pistol. Somehow, he survived. In *Satan Is Real*, the tale is related by Ira's kid brother Charlie, for whom Ira was both a drunken thorn in the side and a partner in early country's greatest duo, the Louvin Brothers. This memoir – completed two months before Charlie died from pancreatic cancer last year – is packed with vivid tales: of a cotton-picking upbringing, of an abusive father, of 13 years of speed-fueled touring in which the Brothers took their spooky, Baptist-influenced songs all over dusty back roads. By 1955, they'd made it to the Grand Ole Opry, but Ira did his best to sabotage their career, smashing mandolins onstage and calling admirer Elvis Presley a "white nigger" when they toured together. He died in a car collision in 1965, but you can still feel him breathing in these pages; Charlie even devotes an entire tearful chapter to visiting his brother's grave shortly after his death, singing one last duet with his ghost. "I got up and [walked] back to my car. Knowing that we'd sing together again," Charlie writes. "Just not here."

PATRICK DOYLE



The Book of Drugs

★★★★½

Mike Doughty *Da Capo*

This rambling memoir by the former singer of Nineties art-groovers Soul Coughing lives up to its title. It's full

of stoner-porn road stories: snorting junk with Jeff Buckley, watching Redman trip out on 'shrooms. Doughty is a funny, unsparing writer, and if he often comes across as a prick (like most everyone else here), he's a deeply self-aware one; his eventual salvation – qualified, full of doubts – feels as real and lived as they come.

W.H.



Fug You

★★★★½

Ed Sanders *Da Capo*

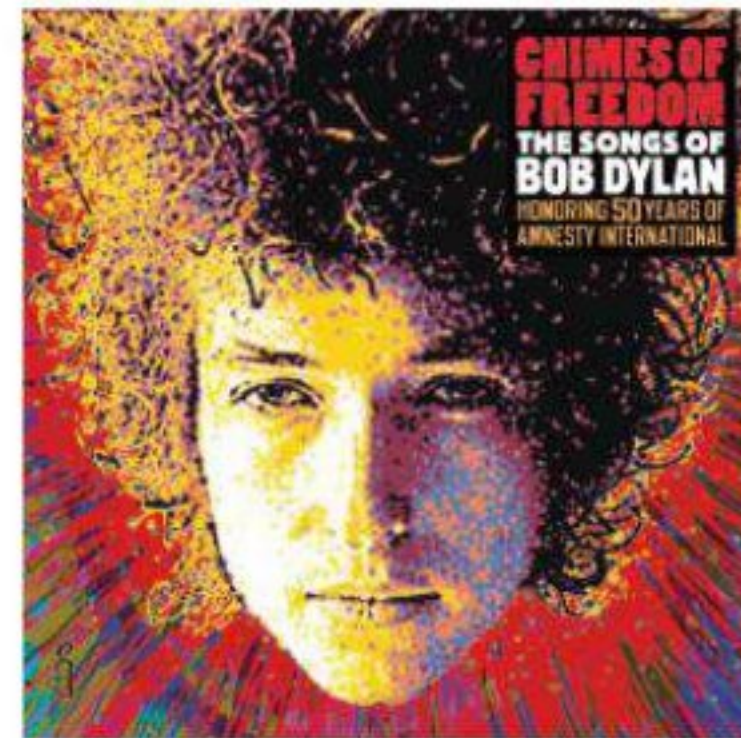
Not many bands could make a racket like the Fugs – the 1960s folk-garage pranksters led by two counterculture poets – while keeping the vibe heavy on community.

Co-founder Sanders pulls off the trick with *Fug You*. Hippies will love tales of protests and of films of neighbors shagging in the name of art. It's unclear whether Sanders' attempt to exorcise the Pentagon of satanic forces succeeded, but his book, like the Fugs, proves "bacchic defiance" can be truly inspiring.

COLIN FLEMING

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BAD COP
Woody Harrelson
tarnishes the badge
as an officer who
hates everybody.

Fall of a Hard-Ass

Woody Harrelson fires up a bruising cop thriller By Peter Travers

Rampart

★★★★½

Woody Harrelson

Directed by Oren Moverman

AS DAVE BROWN, A SEXIST, racist, trigger-tempered police officer carving out his own definition of justice on the mean streets of 1999 Los Angeles, Woody Harrelson climbs to the top of the acting mountain. It's a monumental portrayal of a cop in meltdown – bruisingly brilliant and coiled to spring.

Director Oren Moverman (*The Messenger*), who co-wrote the script with James Ellroy, is a filmmaker with rare skills. He can let us inhale the toxic atmosphere of crime and corruption and then startle us with unexpected feeling. Dave has spent nearly 25 years on the force doing things his way, bending rules out of shape as a matter of course. His record

is shadowed by the killing of a serial rapist that won him the nickname “Date Rape.” But the department can no longer turn a blind eye when Dave is caught on camera beating a suspect. Comparisons to the Rodney King incident fill the air, something the department can’t abide in light of a recent scandal involving more than 70 cops in the Rampart division charged with brutality, evidence tampering and cover-ups. Dave offers no apologies: “I am not a racist. Fact is, I hate all people equally.” Assistant district attorney Joan Confrey (Sigourney Weaver, radiating fire and ice) wants Dave’s head on a platter.

In the hands of a lesser director, that would be that. But Moverman cuts deeper. Without going soft, he refuses to let us ignore the humanity in Dave. And so we see this cop

at home with his wife. Make that two wives. Anne Heche and Cynthia Nixon play the sisters Dave married and divorced in turn, having a daughter with each. Dave is fine sharing the same household, but the women are getting fed up. Dave is allergic to true connection. Yet we get the attraction – such is the force of the cop’s appealing-appalling vibe. Harrelson dropped 25 pounds to make Dave a lean, mean sex machine. And it pays off in magnetism. At a bar, Dave picks up lawyer Linda Fentress (Robin Wright), and we see disaster coming. It does. But the erotic sparks are undeniable.

Moverman is merciless in laying out Dave’s faults. The great cinematogra-

pher Bobby Bukowski uses the hard blaze of the L.A. sun to put Dave under a microscope that even investigator Kyle Timkins (Ice Cube) can’t match. And as Dave tangles with a homeless informant (Harrelson’s *Messenger* co-star Ben Foster) and his ex-cop guru (a terrific Ned Beatty), we understand that the trajectory of Dave’s life is nowhere but down, down, down.

Yup, it could have been a bucket of bleak. But the electric talent of Harrelson and Moverman is too exciting to be anything but exhilarating. These two are playing a game of ferocity and feeling that makes others look like rank amateurs. No chance you’ll forget *Rampart*. Only stupid Oscar voters do that. Thanks to Harrelson and Moverman, this baby stings.

The Grey

★★★★

Liam Neeson

Directed by Joe Carnahan

NATURE IS A BITCH. AS you’ll see in *The Grey*, a terrifically exciting, deeply unsettling survivalist epic about a dirty half-dozen or so whose plane crashes in the Alaskan wilderness, leaving them prey to biting cold and teeth-gnashing wolves. Liam Neeson, in top form, heads the cast as Ottway, a sharpshooter hired by an Alaska oil refinery to keep wolves, bears and other creatures away from the riggers. On a trip home after a grueling five-week shift, the men are victims of a storm that sends their

MAN VS. NATURE
Liam Neeson
in action



SUPERPOWERS
Dane DeHaan



plane crashing into the wilderness. Great scene.

Director Joe Carnahan, who co-wrote the script with Ian Mackenzie Jeffers (based on the Jeffers story "Ghost Walker"), pushes the limits of dramatic tension in the style of his reputation-making 2002 film, *Narc*. Gone is the slick, escapist bounce of Carnahan's *A-Team*. *The Grey* holds you in its grip by staying close to the heart of darkness inside each of its characters. Neeson is just tremendous, finding the fragility underlining Ottway's bravado. Thoughts of suicide haunt Ottway since his split from his wife (Anne Openshaw, seen in flashbacks). But Ottway's sense of command bonds the group, despite protest from ex-con Diaz (Frank Grillo). The men, including Dermot Mulroney, James Badge Dale, Dallas Roberts, Nonso Anozie and Joe Anderson, snipe at one another as the elements drain their humanity. Each actor creates a full portrait even when the script does not. What ultimately unites them is their fear of the marauding wolves.

Carnahan uses puppets, men in wolf suits, even trained animals to take these creatures out of digital fantasy and into a stark reality that will haunt your nightmares. Shot by the gifted cinematographer Masanobu Takayanagi on location in British Columbia, the movie chills you to the bone. Carnahan goes a step further by adding the shiver that comes from plumbing the violence of the mind. *The Grey*, full of beauty and terror and a healing sense of grace, brings us face to face with our own worst fears. Hold on tight. It's a true call of the wild.

Chronicle ★★ ★

Dane DeHaan
Directed by Josh Trank

JUST WHEN I WAS READY TO effing scream if I had to sit through another found-footage chunk of FX out of the *Blair Witch/Paranormal Activity* playbook, along comes *Chronicle* to make me a believer. Despite a gimmicky premise, *Chronicle* fuels its action with characters you can laugh with, understand and even take to heart. Major props to screenwriter Max Landis and director Josh Trank for this mesmerizing mind-bender.

Chronicle starts with high school senior Andrew (Dane DeHaan, looking like a young Leo DiCaprio) setting up a camera in his bedroom to catch his abusive father (Michael Kelly) punching him out while Andrew's mother lies dying downstairs. Andrew, the shy loner, finds that chronicling his life with a camcorder is opening his world. That's especially true when Andrew, his cousin Matt (Alex Russell) and school icon Steve (Michael B. Jordan of *The Wire*) discover a hole in the ground containing something alien. Whatever it is gifts them with powers that start slow with magic tricks, messing with girls and shifting cars in a parking lot. DeHaan, Russell and Jordan excel in their roles, especially when the powers extend to flying and screwing with things dangerous and brutally destructive.

Chronicle is too thrilling (on a cheapie \$15 million budget, yet) to ruin with spoilers. The ending is overkill, but the potent and provocative journey never stops springing surprises. You'll be hooked. **B**

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SCHOOL OF HATE

[Cont. from 57] a reserve of strength she never realized she had, having stepped up as one of five plaintiffs in the civil rights lawsuit against her school district. The road to the federal lawsuit was paved shortly after Justin Aaberg's suicide, when a district teacher contacted the Southern Poverty Law Center to report the anti-gay climate, and the startling proportion of LGBT-related suicide victims. After months of fact-finding, lawyers built a case based on the harrowing stories of anti-gay harassment in order to legally dispute Anoka-Hennepin's neutrality policy. The lawsuit accuses the district of violating the kids' constitutional rights to equal access to education. In addition to making financial demands, the lawsuit seeks to repeal the neutrality policy, implement LGBT-sensitivity training for students and staff, and provide guidance for teachers on how to respond to anti-gay bullying.

The school district hasn't been anxious for a legal brawl, and the two parties have been in settlement talks practically since the papers were filed. Yet the district still stubbornly clung to the neutrality policy until, at a mid-December school-board meeting, it proposed finally eliminating the policy – claiming the move has nothing to do with the discrimination lawsuit – and, bizarrely, replacing it with the Controversial Topics Curriculum Policy, which requires teachers to not reveal their personal opinions when discussing “controversial topics.” The proposal was loudly rejected both by conservatives, who blasted the board for retreating (“The gay activists now have it all,” proclaimed one Parents Action League member) and by LGBT advocates, who understood “controversial topics” to mean gays. Faced with such overwhelming disapproval, the board withdrew its proposed policy in January – and suggested a new policy in its place: the Respectful Learning Environment Curriculum Policy, which the board is expected to swiftly approve.

The school district insists it has been portrayed unfairly. Superintendent Carlson points out it has been working hard to address the mental-health needs of its students by hiring more counselors and staff – everything, it seems, but admit that its policy has created problems for its LGBT community. “We understand that gay kids are bullied and harassed on a daily basis,” and that that can lead to suicide, Carlson says. “But that was not the case here. If you're looking for a cause, look in the area of mental health.” In that sense, the district is in step with PAL. “How could *not* discussing homosexuality in the public-school classrooms cause a teen to take his or her own life?” PAL asked ROLLING STONE in an e-mail, calling the idea “absurd,” going on to say, “Because homosexual activists have hijacked and exploited teen suicides

for their moral and political utility, much of society seems not to be looking closely and openly at all the possible causes of the tragedies,” including mental illness. Arguably, however, it is members of PAL who have hijacked this entire discussion from the very start: Though they've claimed to represent the “majority” opinion on gay issues, and say they have 1,200 supporters, one PAL parent reported that they have less than two dozen members.

Teachers' union president Blaha, who calls the district's behavior throughout this ordeal “irrational,” speculates that the district's stupefying denial is a reaction to the terrible notion that they might have played a part in children's suffering, or even their deaths: “I think your mind just reels in the face of that stress and that horror. They just lost their way.”

That denial reaches right up to the pinnacle of the local political food chain: Michele Bachmann, who stayed silent on the suicide cluster in her congressional district for months – until Justin's mom, Tammy Aaberg, forced her to comment. In September, while Bachmann was running for the GOP presidential nomination, Aaberg delivered a petition of 141,000 signatures to Bachmann's office, asking her to address the Anoka-Hennepin suicides and publicly denounce anti-gay bullying. Bachmann has publicly stated her opposition to anti-bullying legislation, asking in a 2006 state Senate committee hearing, “What will be our definition of bullying? Will it get to the point where we are completely stifling free speech and expression? ... Will we be expecting boys to be girls?” Bachmann responded to the petition with a generic letter to constituents telling them that “bullying is wrong,” and “all human lives have undeniable value.” Tammy Aaberg found out about the letter secondhand. “I never got a letter,” says Tammy, seated in the finished basement of the Aabergs' new home in Champlin; the family couldn't bear to remain in the old house where Justin hanged himself. “My kid died in her district. And I'm the one that presented the dang petition!” In a closed room a few feet away are Justin's remaining possessions: his cello, in a closet; his soccer equipment, still packed in his Adidas bag. Tammy's suffering hasn't ended. In mid-December, her nine-year-old son was hospitalized for suicidal tendencies; he'd tried to drown himself in the bathtub, wanting to see his big brother again.

Justin's suicide has left Tammy on a mission, transforming her into an LGBT activist and a den mother for gay teens, intent upon turning her own tragedy into others' salvation. She knows too well the price of indifference, or hostility, or denial. Because there's one group of kids who can't afford to live in denial, a group for whom the usual raw teenage struggles over identity, peer acceptance and controlling one's own

impulsivity are matters of extreme urgency – quite possibly matters of life or death.

Which brings us to Anoka Middle School for the Arts' first Gay Straight Alliance meeting of the school year, where 19 kids seated on the linoleum floor try to explain to me what the GSA has meant to them. “It's a place of freedom, where I can just be myself,” a preppy boy in basketball shorts says. This GSA, Sam Johnson's legacy, held its first meeting shortly after her death under the tutelage of teacher Fietek, and has been a crucial place for LGBT kids and their friends to find support and learn coping skills. Though still a source of local controversy, there is now a student-initiated GSA in every Anoka-Hennepin middle and high school. As three advisers look on, the kids gush about how affirming the club is – and how necessary, in light of how unsafe they continue to feel at school. “I'll still get bullied to the point where—” begins a skinny eighth-grade girl, then takes a breath. “I actually had to go to the hospital for suicide,” she continues, looking at the floor. “I just recently stopped cutting because of bullying.”

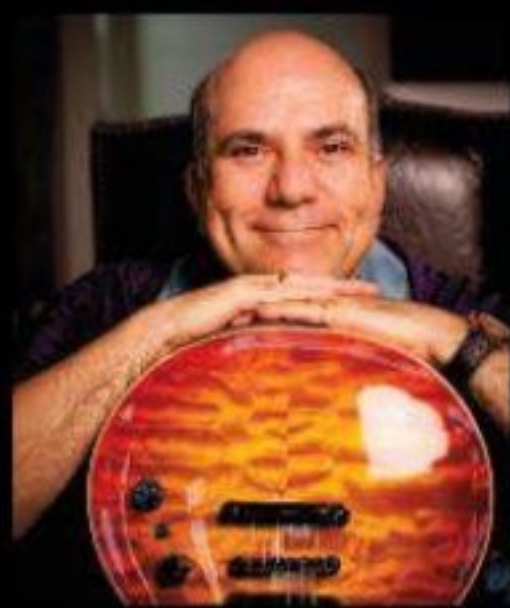
I ask for a show of hands: How many of you feel safe at school? Of the 19 kids assembled, two raise their hands. The feeling of insecurity continues to reverberate particularly through the Anoka-Hennepin middle schools these days, in the wake of the district's ninth suicide. In May, Northdale Middle School's Jordan Yenor, a 14-year-old with no evident LGBT connection, took his life. Psychologist Cashen says that at Northdale Middle alone this school year, several students have been hospitalized for mental-health issues, and at least 14 more assessed for suicidal ideation; for a quarter of them, she says, “Sexual orientation was in the mix.”

A slight boy with an asymmetrical haircut speaks in a soft voice. “What this GSA means to me, is: In sixth grade my, my only friend here, committed suicide.” The room goes still. He's talking about Samantha. The boy starts to cry. “She was the one who reached out to me.” He doubles over in tears, and everyone collapses on top of him in a group hug. From somewhere in the pile, he continues to speak in a trembling voice: “I joined the GSA 'cause I wanted to be just like her. I wanted to be nice and – loved.”

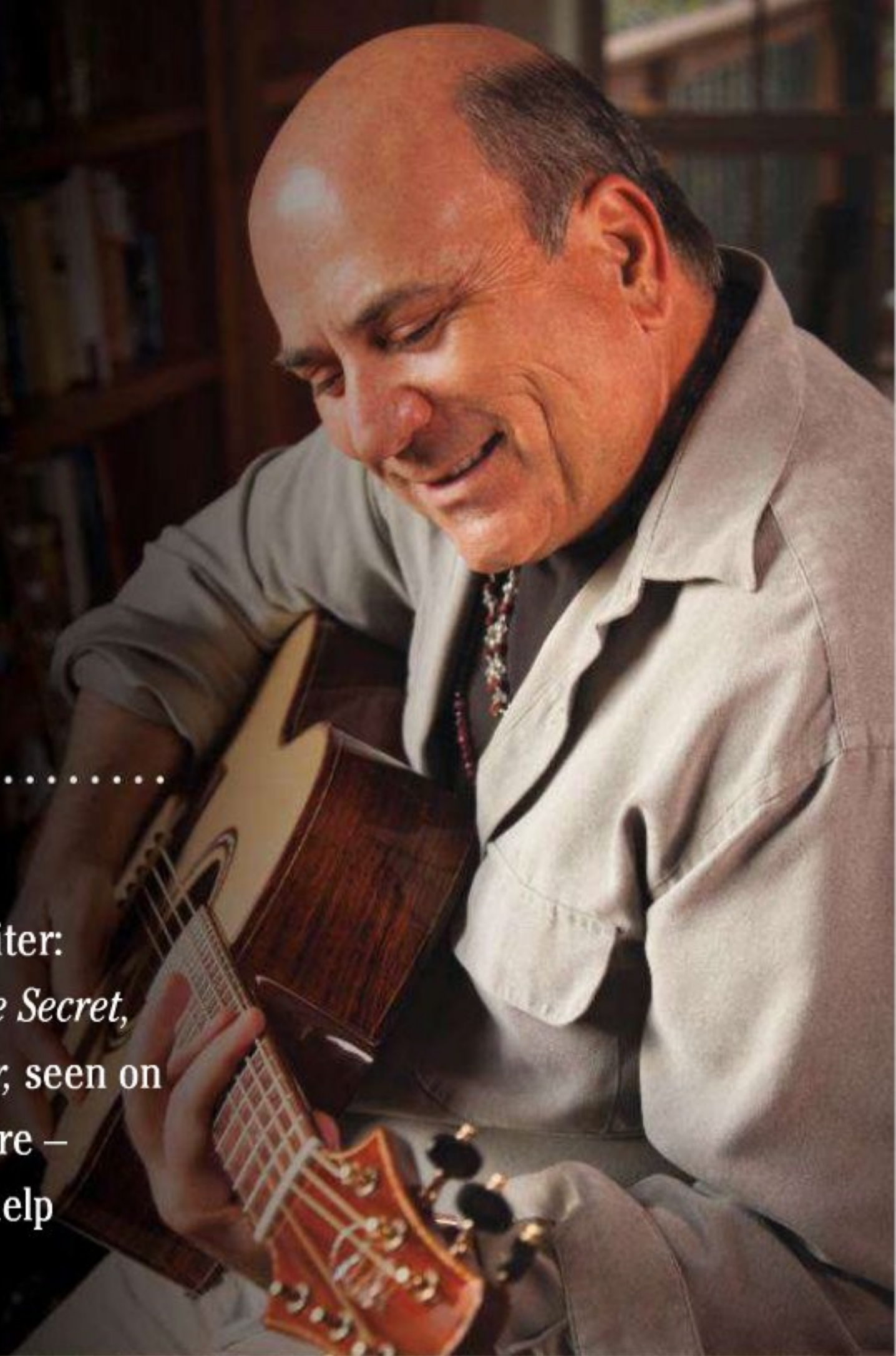
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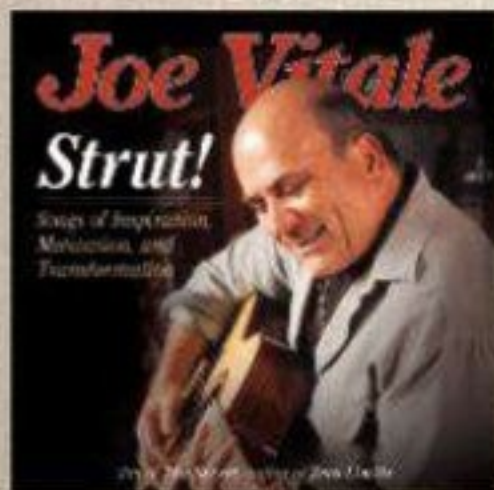
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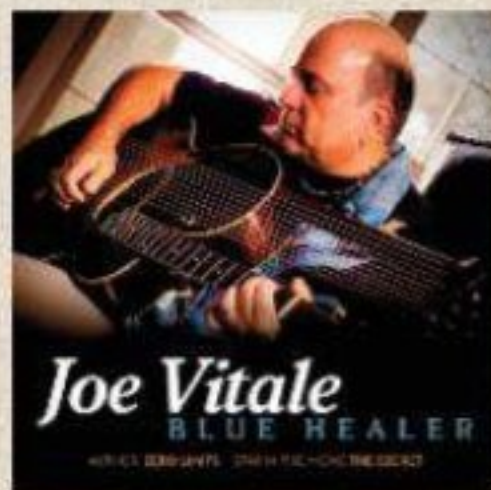
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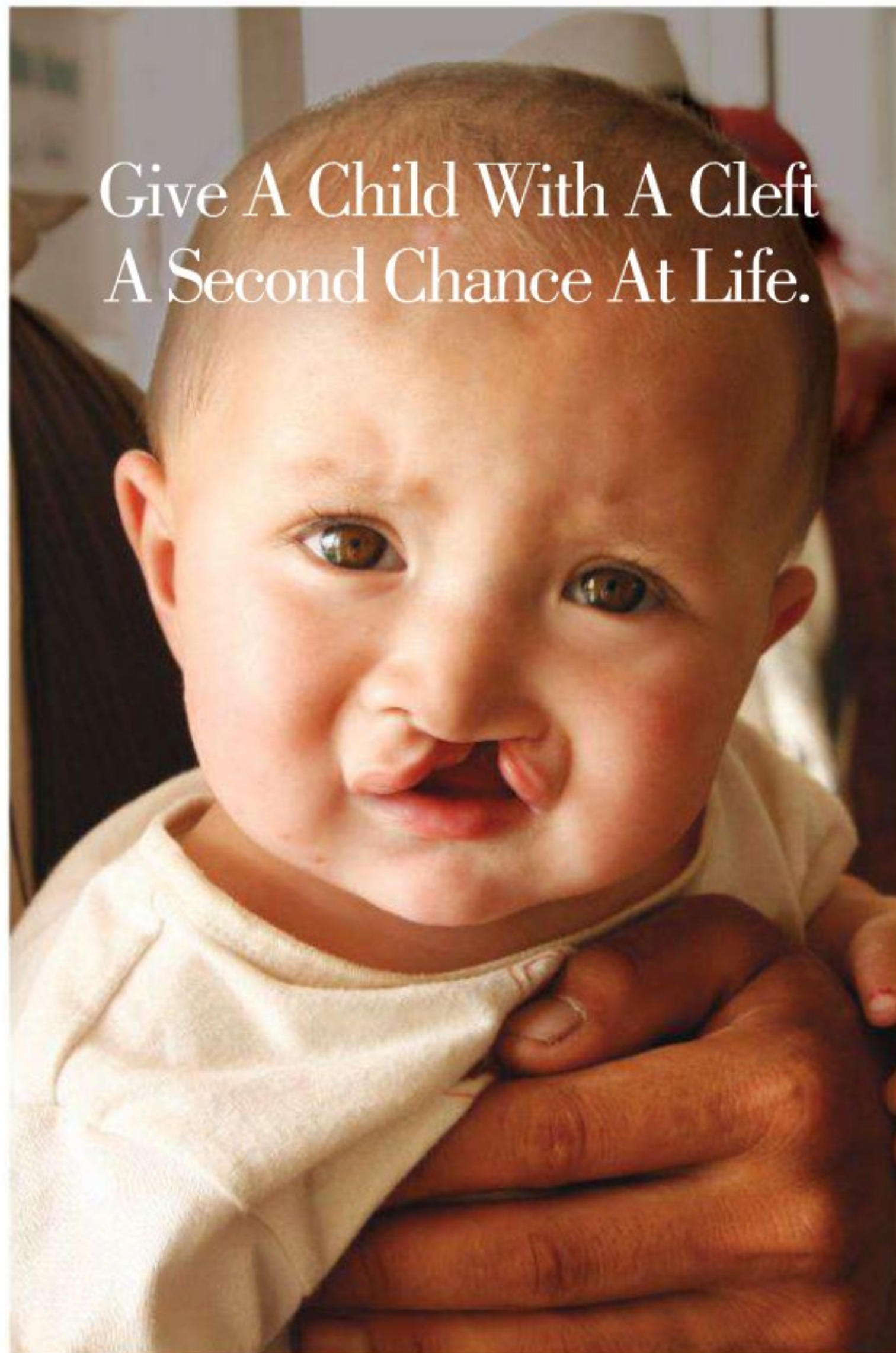
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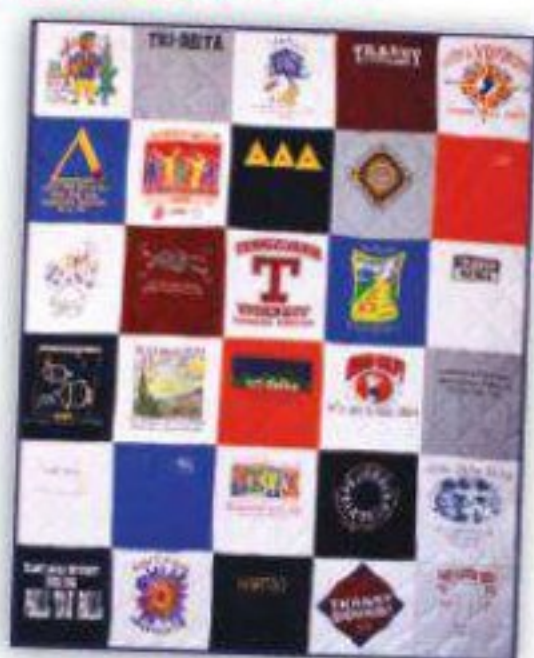
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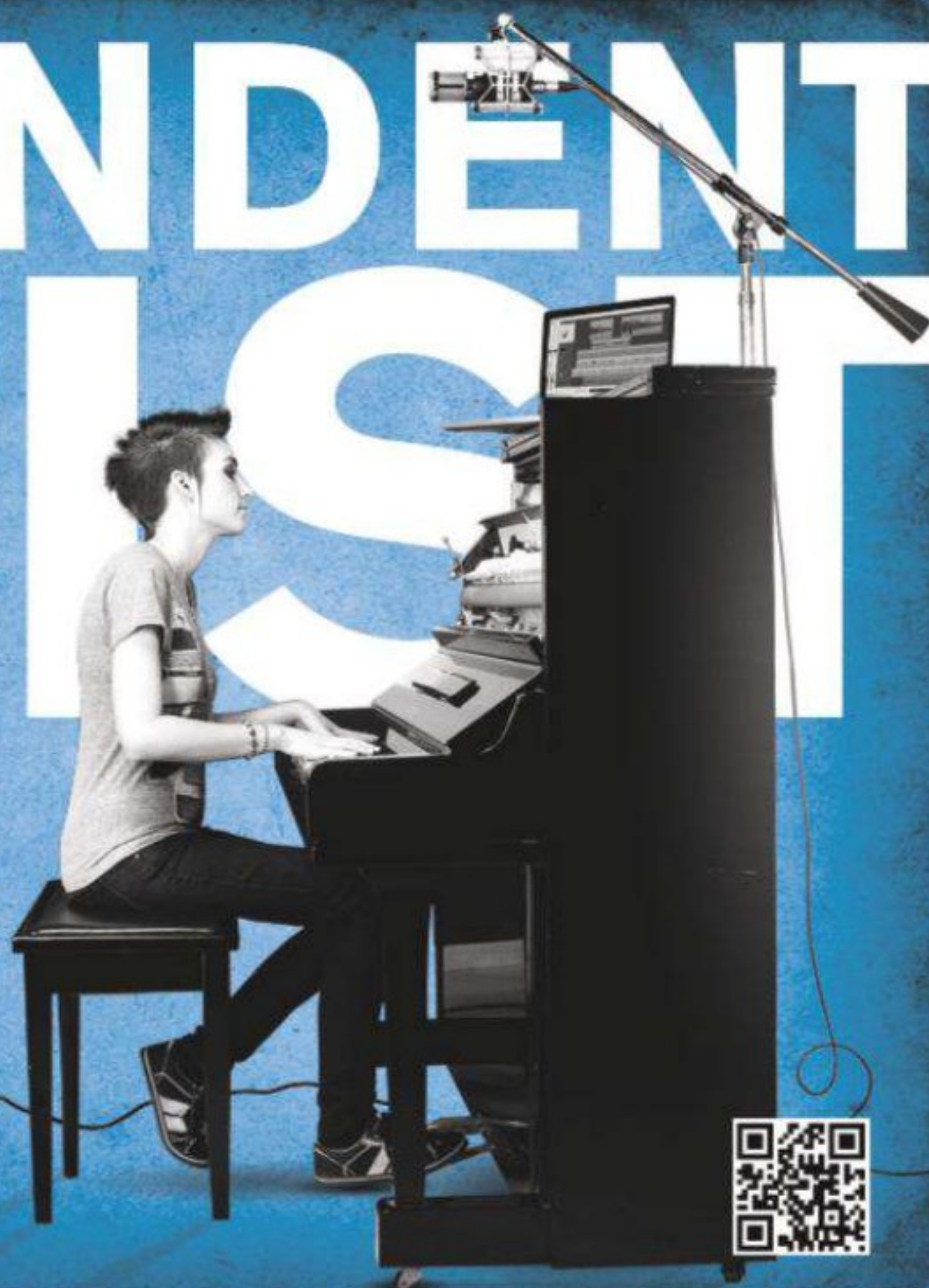


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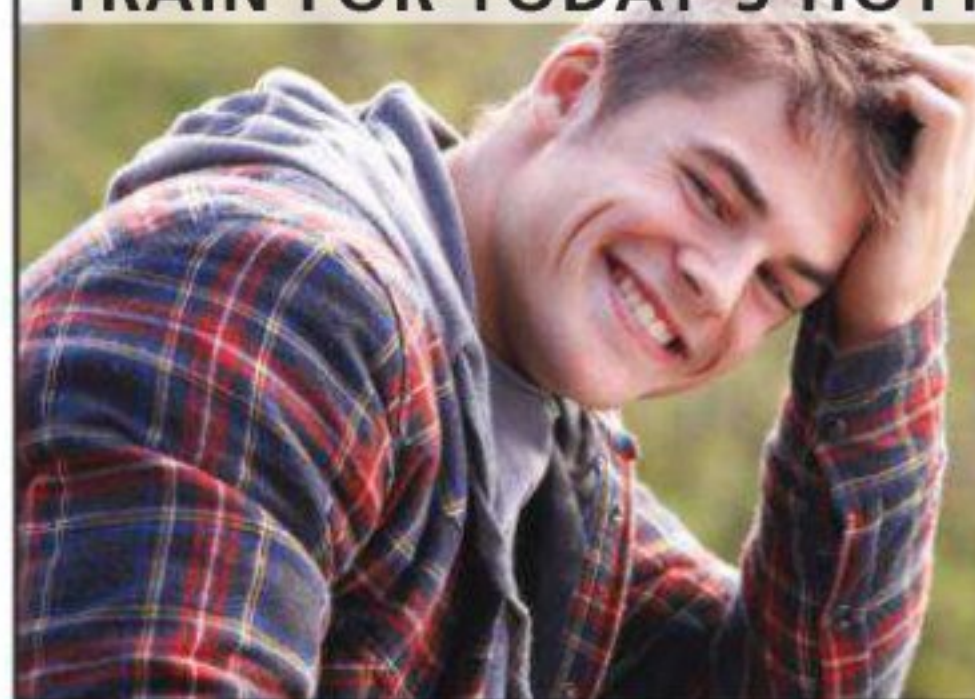


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CHARTS

iTunes TOP 10 SONGS

- David Guetta**
"Turn Me On" *What a Music/Astralwerks/Capitol*
- Adele**
"Set Fire to the Rain" *XL/Columbia*
- Kelly Clarkson**
"What Doesn't Kill You (Stronger)" *19*
- Tyga**
"Rack City" *Cash Money/Motown*
- Flo Rida**
"Good Feeling" *Poe Boy/Atlantic*
- Wiz Khalifa and Snoop Dogg**
"Young, Wild & Free" *Atlantic*
- Rihanna**
"We Found Love" *SRP/Def Jam*
- LMFAO**
"Sexy and I Know It" *Party Rock/Will.i.am/Cherrytree/Interscope*
- Jessie J**
"Domino" *Lava Music/Republic*
- Jay-Z and Kanye West**
"Ni**as in Paris" *Roc-a-Fella/Roc Nation/Def Jam*



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COLLEGE RADIO TOP 10 ALBUMS

- The Black Keys**
El Camino Nonesuch
- Guided by Voices**
Let's Go Eat the Factory GBV
- M83**
Hurry Up, We're Dreaming Mute
- Nada Surf**
The Stars Are Indifferent to Astronomy Barsuk
- Thee Oh Sees**
Carrión Crawler/The Dream (EP) In the Red
- Tom Waits**
Bad as Me Anti-
- Atlas Sound**
Parallax 4AD
- Kate Bush**
50 Words for Snow Anti-
- Porcelain Raft**
Strange Weekend Secretly Canadian
- Gotye**
Making Mirrors Universal Republic



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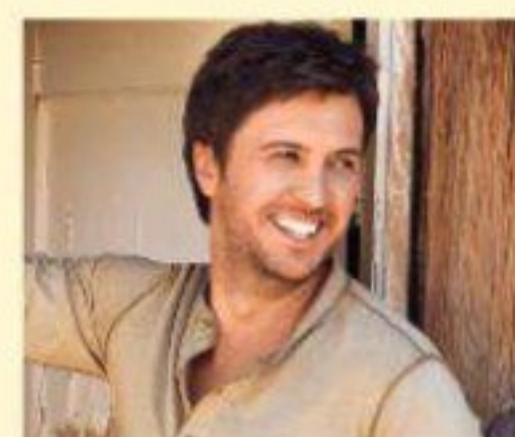
Top 40 Albums

- 1** **Adele**
21 *XL/Columbia*
- 2** **Kidz Bop Kids**
Kidz Bop 21 *Razor & Tie*
- 3** **The Black Keys**
El Camino Nonesuch
- 4** **Drake**
Take Care Young Money/Cash Money
- 5** **Rihanna**
Talk That Talk SRP/Def Jam
- 6** **Young Jeezy**
TM: 103: Hustlerz Ambition CTE/Def Jam
- 7** **James Fortune and Fiya**
Identity Fiya World/Light
- 8** **Toby Keith**
Clancy's Tavern Show Dog-Universal
- 9** **Coldplay**
Mylo Xyloto Capitol
- 10** **Nickelback**
Here and Now Roadrunner
- 11** **Attack Attack!**
This Means War Rise
- 12** **Joyful Noise**
Soundtrack Watertower
- 13** **LMFAO**
Sorry for Party Rocking Party Rock/Will.i.am/Cherrytree/Interscope
- 14** **Kelly Clarkson**
Stronger 19
- 15** **Adele**
19 *XL/Columbia*
- 16** **Now 40**
Various Artists *Universal/EMI/Sony Music*
- 17** **Lady Antebellum**
Own the Night Capitol Nashville
- 18** **Luke Bryan**
Tailgates and Tanlines Capitol Nashville
- 19** **Florence and the Machine**
Ceremonials Universal Republic
- 20** **David Crowder Band**
Give Us Rest Or (A Requiem Mass in C [the Happiest of All Keys]) Sixsteps/Sparrow
- 21** **Jay-Z and Kanye West**
Watch the Throne Roc-a-Fella/Roc Nation/Def Jam
- 22** **The Band Perry**
The Band Perry Republic Nashville
- 23** **Mary J. Blige**
My Life II... The Journey Continues (Act 1) Matriarch/Geffen
- 24** **Jason Aldean**
My Kinda Party Broken Bow
- 25** **Skrillex**
Bangarang (EP) Big Beat/Owsia/Atlantic
- 26** **Ani DiFranco**
Which Side Are You On? Righteous Babe
- 27** **Anthony Green**
Beautiful Things Photo Finish
- 28** **Mumford & Sons**
Sigh No More Glassnote
- 29** **Scotty McCreery**
Clear as Day 19/Mercury Nashville
- 30** **Lil Wayne**
Tha Carter IV Young Money/Cash Money
- 31** **Foster the People**
Torches Startime/Columbia
- 32** **Amy Winehouse**
Lioness: Hidden Treasures Universal Republic
- 33** **Snow Patrol**
Fallen Empires Polydor/Fiction/Island
- 34** **Taylor Swift**
Speak Now Big Machine
- 35** **Florence and the Machine**
Lungs Universal Republic
- 36** **Maroon 5**
Hands All Over A&M/Octone
- 37** **Tim McGraw**
Number One Hits Curb
- 38** **Brantley Gilbert**
Halfway to Heaven Valory
- 39** **Kathleen Edwards**
Voyageur Zoe/Rounder
- 40** **Anthony Hamilton**
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In the slow month of January, crabcore kings (they are the only band in the genre) Attack Attack! almost hit the Top 10 by selling just 17,000 copies.



Lucky Luke

After 24 weeks on the charts, country hunk Bryan's breezy third LP, *Tailgates and Tanlines*, is still going strong, with 696,000 copies sold total.



Ani Get Your Gun

The indie pioneer rallies for the 99 percent on her 17th LP - featuring Pete Seeger playing banjo on the furious title track. It sold 11,000 copies.



Snow Falls

Snow Patrol's sixth LP - which adds dance beats to their arena-ready Coldplay-ish rock anthems - dropped 28 spots in its second week on shelves.

00 Chart position on Jan. 25th, 2012
00 Chart position on Jan. 18th, 2012
NEW New Entry ↑ Greatest Gainer
2ND Re-Entry

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From the Vault

RS 101, February 3rd, 1972

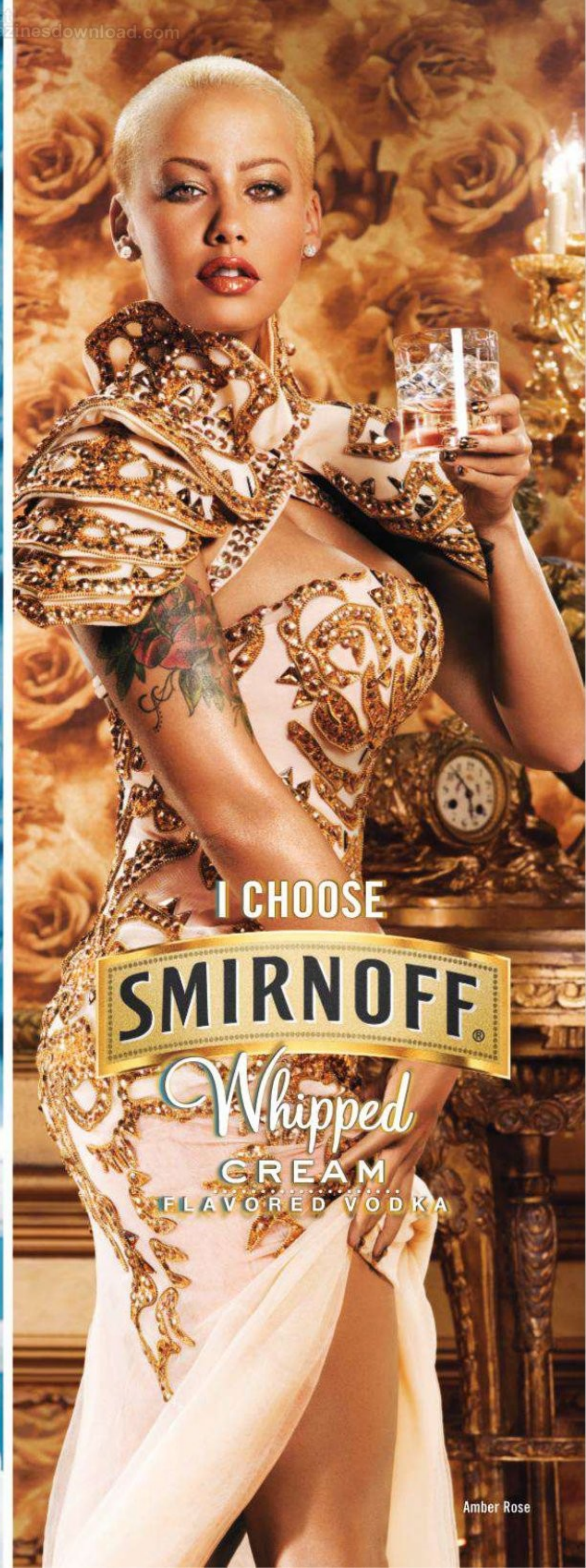
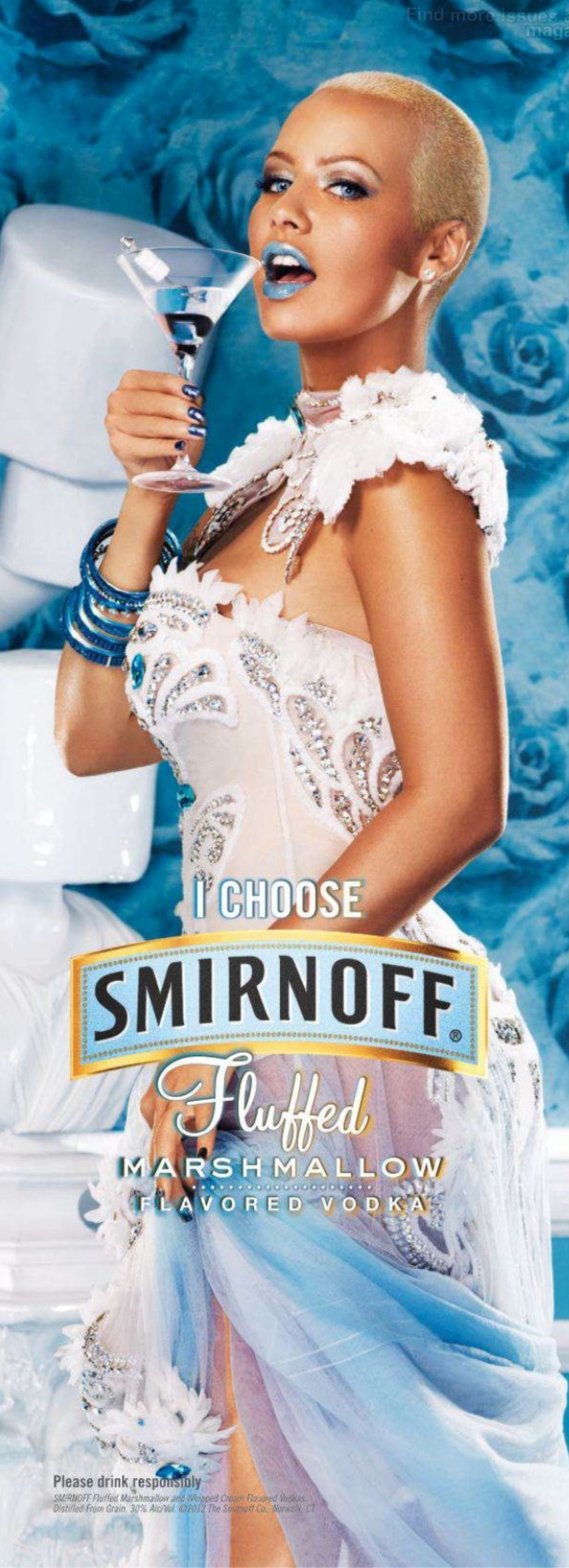
TOP 10 SINGLES

- Don McLean**
"American Pie" *United Artists*
- Al Green**
"Let's Stay Together" *Hi*
- Melanie**
"Brand New Key" *Neighborhood*
- Badfinger**
"Day After Day" *Apple*
- Nilsson**
"Without You" *RCA*
- Three Dog Night**
"Never Been to Spain" *Dunhill*
- Jonathan Edwards**
"Sunshine" *Capricorn*
- Climax**
"Precious and Few" *Rocky Road*
- Carpenters**
"Hurting Each Other" *A&M*
- Apollo 100**
"Joy" *Mega*



On the Cover

"I've always thought that the Grateful Dead should be sponsored by the government. It should be a public service, and they should set us up to play at places that need to get high. We shouldn't be business. That's the direction I'm looking to go into." —Jerry Garcia



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